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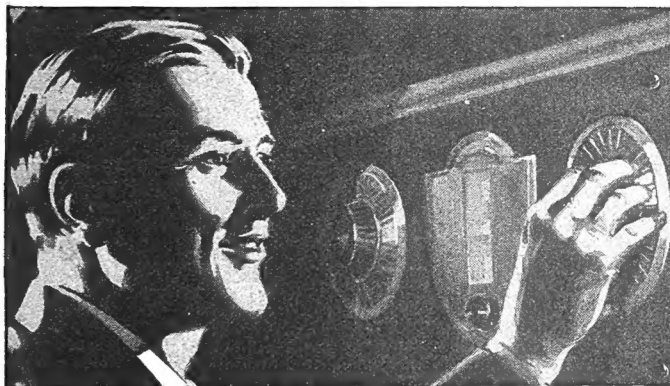


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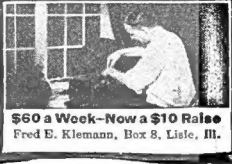
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ALL-STORY

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Volume II—No. 2

Love Stories of the American Girl

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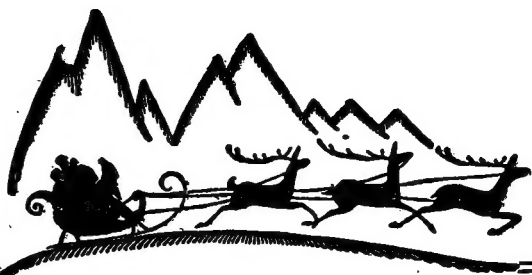
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A Yuletide Gift

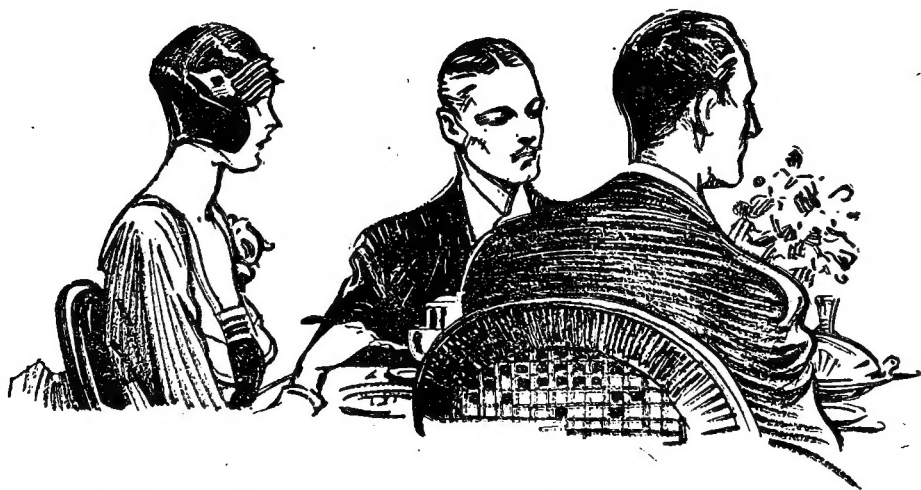
NOW all the night is sweet with Christmas bells,
Now shining hosts of herald angels sing,
In chorusing that mystically swells,

“Unto the world is born a Savior King!”
While Shepherds, leaving lambs as white as snow
And following the gleaming of a star,
Are kneeling with the Wise Men humbly low
Where Mary and her Blessed Baby are;

I come to you with myrrh and flaming silk,
With flashing jewels and with yellow gold,
With silver that is ghostlier than milk,
With rings and bracelets for your hands to hold.
But lo, of all my gifts the richest part,
My darling, is an ever-faithful heart!

—Edgar Daniel Kramer

The Love Master



*Who can know the heart of a flirt, or see that
sometimes it is only waiting for the one,
all-conquering love?*

By Ethel M. Dell

"I REALLY don't know why I accepted him. It was done before I knew. He dances so divinely that it intoxicates me, and then I cease to be responsible for my actions."

Doris Fielding leaned back luxuriously, her hands clasped behind her head.

"I can't imagine why he wants to marry me," she added reflectively. "I am quite sure I don't care to marry him."

"Then, my dear child, what possessed you to accept him?" remonstrated her friend, Vera Abingdon, from behind the tea table.

"That's just what I don't know," said Doris, a little smile twitching the corner of her mouth. "However, it doesn't signify greatly. I don't mind being engaged for a little while if he is good, but I certainly shan't go on if I don't like it. It's in the nature of an experiment, you see; and it really is necessary, for there is absolutely no other way of testing the situation."

She glanced at her friend and burst into a gay peal of laughter. No one knew how utterly charming this girl could be till she laughed.

"Oh, don't look so shocked, please!" Doris begged. "I know I'm flippant,



*The stranger laid
a hand hastily upon
hers and she felt
a note being trans-
ferred to her*

flighty, and foolish, but really I'm not a bit wicked. Ask Phil if I am. He has known me all my life."

"I do not need to ask him, Dot." Vera spoke with some gravity notwithstanding. "I have never for a moment thought you wicked. But I do sometimes think you are rather heartless."

Doris opened her blue eyes wide.

"Oh, why? Surely I am not. It really isn't my fault that I have been engaged two or three times before. Directly I begin to get pleasantly inti-

mate with any one he proposes, and how can I possibly know, unless I am on terms of intimacy, whether I should like to marry him or not? Of course, I don't want to be engaged to the

same person for any length of time. It's as bad as being cast up on a desert island with only one wretched man to speak to."

Again that utterly fascinating laugh cascaded like a wave of melody.

"AS a matter of fact," Doris continued, "what you call heartlessness is sheer broad-mindedness on my part. I admit that I do occasionally sail near the wind. It's fun, and I like it. But I never do any harm—any *real* harm, I mean. I always

put my helm over in time. And I must protect myself somehow against fortune hunters."

Vera was silent. This high-spirited young cousin of her husband's was often a sore anxiety to her. She had had sole charge of the girl for the past three years, and had found it no light responsibility.

"Cheer up, darling!" besought Doris. "There is not the smallest cause for a wrinkled brow. Perhaps the experiment will turn out a success this time. Who knows? And even if it doesn't, no one will be any the worse. I am sure Brian Caldwell will never break his heart for me."

But Vera Abingdon shook her head.

"I don't like you to be so wild, Dot. It makes people think lightly of you. And you know how angry Phil was last time."

Dot snapped her fingers airily and rose.

"Who cares for Phil? Besides, it really wasn't my fault last time, whatever any one may say. Are you going to ask Brian down to Rivermead for Easter? Because if you do, I do beg you won't tell everybody we are engaged. It is quite an informal arrangement, and, perhaps, considering all the circumstances, the less said about it the better."

She stopped and kissed Vera's grave face, laughed again as though she could not help it, and flitted like a butterfly from the room.

"WHERE is Doris?" asked Phil Abingdon, looking around at the guests assembled in his drawing-room at Rivermead. "We are all waiting for her."

"I think we had better go in without her," said his wife, with her nervous smile. "She arranged to motor

down with Mrs. Lockyard and her party this afternoon. Possibly they have persuaded her to dine with them."

"She would never do that surely," said Phil, with an involuntary glance at Brian Caldwell, who had just entered.

"If you are talking about my fiancée, I think it more than probable that she would," the latter remarked. "Mrs. Lockyard's place is just across the river, I understand? Shall I drive over for Doris?"

"No, no!" broke in his hostess anxiously. "I am sure she wouldn't come if you did. Besides—"

"Oh, as to that," observed Brian with a grim smile, "I think, with all deference to your opinion, that the odds would be in my favor. However, let us dine first, if you prefer it."

Mrs. Abingdon did prefer it, and said so hastily. She seemed to have a morbid dread of a rupture between Doris Fielding and her fiancé, a feeling with which Brian quite obviously had no sympathy.

There was nothing very remarkable about the man save this somewhat supercilious demeanor which had caused Vera to marvel many times at Doris's choice.

They went in to dinner without further discussion. Brian sat on Vera's left, and amazed her by his apparent unconcern over Doris. He seemed to be in excellent spirits, and his wise cracks provoked a good deal of merriment.

Vera led the way back to the drawing-room as soon as possible. There was a billiard room beyond to which the members of her party speedily betook themselves, and here most of the men joined them.

Neither Brian nor Phil was with them, and Vera counted the minutes

of their absence with a sinking heart while her guests buzzed all unheeding around her.

It was close upon ten o'clock when she saw her husband's face for a moment in the doorway. He made a rapid sign to her. With a murmured excuse she went to him, closing the door behind her.

Brian was standing with him, calm as ever, though she fancied that his eyes were a little wider than usual and his bearing less supercilious.

Her husband, she saw at a glance, was both angry and agitated.

"She has gone somewhere with that fellow Brandon," he said. "They were with Mrs. Lockyard for tea and drove off immediately afterward."

"Phil!" exclaimed Vera in consternation. "What can we do about it?"

"There was some talk of Wynchampton," Brian replied quietly. "I am going there now in your husband's car. If I do not find her there—"

He paused, and on the instant a girl's high peal of laughter rang through the house. The drawing-room door was flung back, and Doris herself stood on the threshold!

"GOODNESS!" she cried. "What a solemn conclave! You can't think how funny you all look. Do tell me what it's about."

Vera hastened to meet her with outstretched hands.

"Oh, my dear, you can't think how anxious we have been about you."

Doris lightly kissed her.

"Silly! Why? You know I always come up smiling. Why, Phil, you are looking positively green! Have you been anxious, too? I am indeed honored."

She swept him a curtsy, her dainty face dimpled with laughter.

"We've had the best time," she declared. "We motored to Wynchampton and saw the last of the races. After that we dined at a dear little tea shop with a duck pond at the bottom of the garden. And finally we returned—it ought to have been by moonlight, only there was no moon. Where is every one? In the billiard room? I want some hot chocolate frightfully. Brian, you might, like the good sort you are, go and get me some."

She bestowed a dazzling smile upon her fiancé and offered him one finger by way of salutation.

Phil Abingdon, who had been waiting to get in a word, here exploded with some violence and told his young cousin what he thought of her.

She listened with her head on one side, her eyes brimful of mischief, and finally with an airy gesture turned to Brian.

"Don't you want to scold me, too? I'm certain you do. You'd better be quick or there won't be anything left to say."

Abingdon turned on his heel and walked away. He was thoroughly angry, and made no attempt to hide it. His wife lingered a moment irresolute, then softly followed him.

AS the door closed, Brian looked very steadily into the girl's flushed face and spoke:

"All I have to say is this: Maurice Brandon is no fit escort for any girl who values her reputation. And I here and now forbid you most strictly, most emphatically, ever to go out with him alone again."

He paused. She was looking straight back at him with her chin in the air.

"Dear me!" she said. "Do you really? And who gave you the right to dictate to me?"

"You yourself," he answered quietly.

"Indeed! May I ask when?"

He stiffened a little, but his face did not alter.

"When you promised to be my wife."

Her eyes blazed instant defiance.

"An engagement can be broken off!" she declared recklessly.

"Yes," Brian replied, gazing at her fixedly, almost hypnotically, "but you don't want to break it off, and I don't either."

"Don't be too sure about that," she rejoined. "You couldn't possibly hold me against my will."

"I am quite capable of doing so," he told her coolly, "if I think it worth my while."

"Worth your while!" she exclaimed with a sudden realization of the force of his personality that drew her to him almost in spite of herself.

"Yes," said Brian. "I believe that a heartless little flirt like you can be transformed into a worth while wife. It may prove a difficult process, I admit, and perhaps not altogether a pleasant one. But I shall not shirk it on that account."

HE leaned back against the mantelpiece with a gesture plainly indicating that so far as he was concerned the matter was ended.

But not so with Doris. She stood before him for several seconds absolutely motionless, all the vivid color gone from her face, her blue eyes blazing with speechless fury.

At length, with a sudden, fierce movement, she tore her ring from her finger and held it out to him.

"Take it back!" she cried, her voice high pitched and tremulous. "This is the end!"

The man did not stir.

"Not yet, I think," he said.

She flashed at him a glance of mingled pride and uncertainty, then made a sudden swoop toward the fire.

Brian read her intention in a second and, stooping swiftly, caught her hand. The ring shot from her hold, gleamed in a shining curve in the firelight, and fell with a tinkle among the ashes.

Brian did not utter a word, but his face was fixed and grim as, still tightly gripping the hand he had caught, he knelt and groped among the half dead embers for the ring it had wantonly flung there.

When he found it he rose.

"Before you do anything of that sort again," he said, "let me advise you to stop and think. It will do you no harm, and may save trouble."

He took her left hand, paused a moment, and then deliberately fitted the ring back upon her finger.

Doris made no resistance, for she was instinctively aware that he would brook no more from her just then. She was, in fact, a bit frightened, though his voice had been perfectly quiet and even.

Something in his touch had set her heart beating, something electric, something terrifying. She dared not meet his eyes.

The man dropped her hand almost contemptuously. There was nothing lover-like about him at that moment.

"And remember," he warned, "that no experiment can prove a success unless it is given a fair trial. You will continue to be engaged to me until I set you free. Is that understood?"

Doris did not answer. She was pulling at the loose ends of her scarf with restless fingers, her face downcast and very pale. Then he spoke sharply:

"Doris!"

She glanced up at him appealingly. "I am rather tired," she evaded, and her voice quivered a little. "Do you mind if I say good night?"

"Answer me first," he said.

She shook her head.

"I forget what you asked me. It doesn't matter, does it? There's some one coming, and I don't want to be caught. Good night!"

She whisked round before he could realize her intention, and in a moment was at the door. She waved a hand to him airily as she disappeared.

And Brian was left to wonder if her somewhat precipitate departure could be regarded as a sign of defeat or merely a postponement of the struggle.

IT was the afternoon of Easter Day, and a marvelous peace lay upon all things.

Maurice Brandon, a look of supreme boredom on his handsome face, had just sauntered down to the river bank. A belt of daffodils nodded to him from the shrubbery on the farther shore. He stood and stared at them absently while he idly smoked a cigarette.

After a long and quite unprofitable inspection, he turned aside to investigate a boathouse under the willows on Mrs. Lockyard's side of the stream. He found the door unlocked, and discovered within a somewhat dilapidated rowboat.

This, after considerable exertion, he managed to drag forth and finally to run into the water. The craft seemed seaworthy, and he proceeded to forage for oars.

Fully equipped at length, he stepped on board and rowed out from the shore.

Arriving at the farther bank, Brandon calmly disembarked and tied up under the willows. He paused a few

seconds to light another cigarette, then turned from the river and sauntered up the path between the high box hedges.

The garden was deserted, so he pursued his way unmolested till he came within sight of the house. Here for the first time he stopped to take deliberate stock of his surroundings.

Standing in the shelter of a giant rhododendron, he saw two figures emerge and walk along the narrow graveled terrace before the house. As he watched, they reached the farther end and turned. He recognized them both. They were Brian Caldwell and his host, Phil Abingdon.

For a few moments they stood talking, then went away together around an angle of the house.

Scarcely had they disappeared before a girl's light figure appeared at an upstairs window. Doris's mischievous face peeped forth, wearing her gayest, most impudent grimace.

There was no one else in sight, so Brandon stepped into full view and, without the faintest suggestion of concealment, began to stroll up the winding path.

She heard his footsteps on the gravel, and turned her eyes upon him with a swift start of recognition, whereupon he raised his hand in airy salute.

He heard her low murmur of laughter as she waved him a hasty sign to await her in the shrubbery from which he had just emerged.

"DID you actually row across the river?" Doris asked. "Whatever made you do that?"

"I said I should come for you if you didn't turn up," Brandon replied.

She laughed.

"Do you always keep your word?"

"To you—always," he assured her.

Her merry face colored a little, but she met his eyes with absolute candor.

"And now that you have come, what can we do? Are you going to take me on the river? It looks rather dangerous."

"It is dangerous," Brandon said coolly, "but I think I can get you over in safety if you will allow me to try. In any case, I won't let you drown, you know."

"I shall be furious if anything happens," she told him, "if you splash me even. So beware!"

He pushed out from the bank with a laugh. It was evident that her threat did not greatly impress him.

As for Doris, she was evidently enjoying the adventure, and the risks that attended it only added to its charm. There was something about this man that fascinated her—a freedom and a daring to which her own reckless spirit could not fail to respond.

He was the most interesting plaything she had had for a long time. She had no fear that he would ever make the mistake of taking her seriously—as Brian did.

They reached the opposite bank in safety, and he handed her ashore.

"I have a confession to make," he said, as they walked up to the house.

"Oh, I know what it is," she returned carelessly. "Mrs. Lockyard did not expect me, and has gone out. Right?"

He nodded.

"You are taking it awfully well. One would almost think you didn't mind."

She laughed.

"I never mind anything so long as I am not bored."

"Nor do I," said Brandon. "We

seem to have a good deal in common. But what puzzles me—"

HE broke off. They had reached the open French window that led into Mrs. Lockyard's drawing-room. He stood aside for her to enter.

"Well?" she said as she passed him. "What is this weighty problem?"

He followed her in.

"What puzzles me," he answered, "is how a girl with your natural independence and love of freedom can endure to remain unmarried."

She opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"My dear man, that's why! Independence, love of freedom, and a very strong preference for going my own way."

He laughed a little.

"Yes, but you would have all these things a thousand times multiplied if you were married. Look at all the restraints and restrictions to which girls are subjected, whereas married women simply please themselves. Why, you are absolutely hedged round with conventions. What would they say—your cousin and Mrs. Abingdon—if they knew that you were here with me now? They would hold up their hands in horror."

The girl's thoughts flashed suddenly to Brian. How much freedom might she expect from him?

"It's all very well," she said, with a touch of petulance, "but easy-going husbands don't grow on every bush. I have never yet met the man who wouldn't want to arrange my life in every detail if I married him."

"Yes, you have," Brandon contradicted.

He spoke with deliberate emphasis, and she knew that as he spoke he

looked at her in a manner that there could be no mistaking. Her heart quickened a little, and she felt the color rise in her face.

"DO you know that I am engaged to Brian Caldwell?" she asked.

"Perfectly," he answered.

"I also know, that you have not the smallest intention of marrying him."

She frowned but did not deny it.

He continued with considerable assurance:

"He is not the man to make you happy, and I think you know it. My only wonder is that you didn't realize earlier—before you became engaged to him."

"My engagement was only an experiment," she said quickly.

"And therefore easily broken," he rejoined. "Why don't you put a stop to it?"

She hesitated.

He bent toward her.

"Do you mean to say he is cad enough to attempt to hold you against your will?"

Still she hesitated, half afraid to speak openly.

He leaned nearer, took her hand.

"My dear child," he said, "don't, for Heaven's sake, give in to such tyranny as that and be made miserable for the rest of your life. He would keep you in order, shackle you at every turn. Marry him, and it will be good-bye to liberty—even such liberty as you have now—forever."

Her face had changed. She was very pale.

"I know all that," she answered, speaking rapidly, with headlong impulse. "But, don't you see how difficult it is for me? They"—making a gesture in the direction of her home—"are all on his side, and he is so hor-

ribly strong. Oh, I was a fool to accept him. But we were dancing, and it came so suddenly, I never stopped to think. I wish I could get away now, but I can't."

"I can tell you of a way," said Brandon.

SHE glanced at him. "Oh, yes, I know. But I can't be engaged to two people at once. I couldn't face it. I detest scenes."

"There need be no scene," he said. "You have only to come to me and give me the right to defend you. I ask for nothing better. Even Caldwell would scarcely have the impertinence to dispute it. As my wife you will be absolutely secure from any interference."

She was gazing at him wide-eyed.

"Do you mean—elope?" she questioned slowly.

He drew nearer still and possessed himself of her hands.

"Yes, just that," he said. "It would take a little courage, but you have plenty of that. And the rest I would see to. It wouldn't be so very difficult, you know. Mrs. Lockyard would help us, and you would be absolutely safe with me. I haven't much to offer you, I admit. I'm as poor as a church mouse. But at least you would find me"—he smiled into her startled eyes—"a very easy-going husband, I assure you."

"Oh, I don't know!" Doris said. "I don't know!"

Yet still she left her hands in his, and still she listened to him. That airy reference of his to his poverty affected her favorably. He would scarcely have made it, she told herself, with an unconscious effort to silence unacknowledged misgivings, if her fortune had been the sole attraction,

"Look here," he said, breaking in upon these hasty meditations, "I don't want you to do anything in a hurry. Take a little while to think it over. Let me know to-morrow. I am not leaving till the evening. You shall do nothing, as far as I am concerned, against your will. I want you, now and always, to do exactly as you like. You believe that?"

"I quite believe you mean it at the present moment," she said with a decidedly doubtful smile.

"It will be so always," said Brandon, "whether you believe it or not."

Boldly he raised her face and kissed her on the lips. It seemed to Doris at that moment that even so headlong a scheme as this was not without very material advantages. There were so many drawbacks to being engaged.

WHEN Doris descended to breakfast on the following morning she found an animated party in the dining room discussing the best means of spending the day. Abingdon himself and most of his guests were in favor of attending an aviation meeting at Wynchampton, a few miles away.

Brian was not present, but as she passed through the hall a little later he came in at the front door.

"I was just coming to you," he remarked, pausing to flick the ash from his cigarette before closing the door. "I have been making arrangements for you to drive to Wynchampton with me."

Doris stiffened almost imperceptibly, but the next moment recovered her self-control. Why was she afraid of this man, she asked herself desperately? No man had ever managed to frighten her before.

"I think I should prefer not to go,"

she said, and smiled with quivering lips. "Get Phil to go with you."

"I have talked it over with him," Brian responded gravely. "He agrees with me that this is the best arrangement."

There was to be no escape then. Once more the stronger will prevailed. Without another word she turned from him and went upstairs. She might have defied him, but she knew in her heart that he could win in spite of her.

And she was afraid.

She had a moment of absolute panic as she entered the car. He handed her in, and his grasp, close and firm, seemed to her eloquent of that deadly resolution with which he mastered her.

FOR the first half mile he said nothing whatever. Doris, on her side, sat in unbroken silence, enduring the strain with a set face, dreading the moment when he should have leisure to speak.

Evidently he was in no hurry to do so. Or was it possible that he found some difficulty in choosing his words?

At length he turned his head and spoke.

"I asked you to come," he began, "because there is an important point I want to discuss with you."

"What is it?"

She nerved herself to meet his look, but her eyes fell almost instantly before its steady mastery.

"About our wedding," he said in a calm, deliberate voice. "I should like to have the day fixed."

Her heart gave a great thump of dismay.

"Do you really mean to hunt me down, then, and—and marry me against my will?" she asked, almost panting out the words.

Brian turned his eyes back to the road.

"I mean to marry you—yes," he said. "I think you forget that you accepted me of your own accord."

"I was mad!" the girl broke in passionately.

"People in love are never wholly sane," he remarked cynically.

"I was never in love with you!" Doris cried. "Never, never!"

He raised his eyebrows.

"Nevertheless, you will marry me," he stated.

"Why?" she gasped back furiously. "Why should I marry you? You know I hate you, and you—you—surely you must hate me?"

"No," he said with extreme deliberation, "strange as it may seem, I don't."

SOMETHING in the words quelled her anger. Abruptly she abandoned the struggle and fell silent, her face averted.

"And so," he proceeded, "we may as well decide upon the wedding day without further argument."

"And if—if I refuse?" she murmured weakly.

"You will not refuse," he said with a finality so absolute that her last hope went out like an extinguished candle.

She seized her courage with both hands and turned to him.

"You will give me a little while to think it over?"

"Why?" Brian inquired.

"Because I—I can't possibly decide

upon the spur of the moment," she said confusedly.

Was he going to refuse her even this small request? It almost seemed that he was.

"How long will it take you?" he asked. "Will you give me an answer to-night?"

Her heart leaped to a



Brian read her intention instantly and swiftly caught her hand

sudden hope called to life by his words.

"To-morrow!" she said quickly.

"I said to-night."

"Very well. To-night, then."

"Thanks."

They were his last words on the subject. He seemed to think it ended there.

As for Doris, she sat by his side, outwardly calm but inwardly shaken to the depths. To be thus firmly caught in the meshes of her own net was an experience so new and so terrifying that she was utterly at a loss how to cope with it.

Yet there was a chance, one ray of hope to help her. Major Brandon, the man who had offered her freedom. He was to have his answer to-day. For the first time she began seriously to ponder what that answer should be.

SO far as Doris was concerned the aviation meeting was not a success. There were some wonderful exhibitions of flying, but she was too preoccupied to pay more than a very superficial attention to what she saw.

They lunched at a great hotel overlooking the aviation ground. The place was crowded, and they experienced some difficulty in finding places. Eventually Doris found herself seated at a square table with Brian and two others in the middle of the great dining room.

She was studying a menu as a pretext for avoiding conversation with her fiancé when a man's voice murmured hurriedly in her ear:

"Will you allow me for a moment, please? The lady who has just left this table thinks she must have dropped one of her gloves under it."

Doris pushed back her chair and would have risen, but the speaker was already on his knees and had laid a hasty, restraining hand upon her. It found hers and, under cover of the tablecloth, pressed a note into her fingers.

The next instant he emerged, very red in the face, but triumphant, a lady's glove in his hand.

"Sorry to have disturbed you. Thought I should find it here. Thank you."

He smiled, bowed, and departed, leaving Doris amazed at his audacity. She had met this young man often at Mrs. Lockyard's house, where he was invariably referred to as "the little Fricker boy."

She threw a furtive glance at Brian, but he had noticed nothing. With an uneasy sense of shame she slipped the note into her glove and read it at the earliest opportunity. It contained but one sentence:

If you still wish for freedom, you can find it down by the river at any hour to-night.

There was no signature of any sort; none was needed. Doris hid the message away again, and for the rest of the afternoon she was almost feverishly gay to hide the turmoil of indecision at her heart.

SHE saw little of Brian after luncheon, but he reappeared again in time to drive her back. She found him very quiet and preoccupied on the return journey, but his presence no longer was disheartening. The consciousness that a way of escape was open emboldened her.

They were nearing the end of the drive when at length he laid aside his preoccupation and spoke:

"Have you made up your mind yet?"

It was the last straw. Had he shown the smallest sign of relenting from his grim purpose; had he so much as couched his question in terms of kindness, he might have melted her even then; for she was impulsive ever and quick to respond to warmth.

But the coldness of his question, the

unyielding mastery of his manner impelled her to final rebellion. In the moment that intervened between his question and her reply, the decision was made.

"You shall have my answer to-night," she said.

He turned from her without a word, and a little wonder quivered through her as to the meaning of his silence. She was glad when they reached Rivermead, and she could take refuge in her own room.

Once more she read Brandon's message, read it with a thumping heart, but with no thought of drawing back. It was the only way out for her, she believed.

SHE dressed for dinner, and then made a few hasty preparations for flight. She had no elaborate plans, for she anticipated no difficulty. The night would be dark, and she could rely upon her own ingenuity for the rest. Failure was unthinkable to Doris.

When they rose from the table she waited for Vera and slipped a hand under her arm.

"Do make an excuse for me," she whispered. "I have had a dreadful day, and I can't stand any more. I am going upstairs."

"My dear!" murmured Vera, by way of protest.

Nevertheless she made the excuse almost as soon as they entered the drawing-room, and Doris fled upstairs on winged feet. At the head she met Brian about to descend, almost collided with him. He had evidently been up to his room to get something.

He stood aside for her at once.

"You are not retiring yet?" he asked.

She scarcely glanced at him. She

would not give herself time to be disconcerted.

"I am coming down again," she said, and ran on.

BARELY a quarter of an hour after the encounter with Brian, the girl slipped down the back stairs that led to the servants' quarters, stood listening against a baize door that led into the front hall, then whisked it open and fled across to open the conservatory door, noiseless as a shadow.

The conservatory was in semidarkness. She expected to see no one, looked for no one. A moment she paused by the door that led into the garden, and in that pause she heard a slight sound.

It might have been anything. It probably was a creak from one of the wicker chairs that stood in a corner.

Whatever its origin, it startled her to greater haste. She fumbled at the door and pulled it open.

A gust of wind and rain blew in upon her, but she was scarcely aware of it. In another moment she had softly closed the door again and was scudding across the terrace to the steps that led toward the river path.

As she reached it a light shone out in front of her, wavered, and was gone.

"This way to freedom, lady mine," said Brandon's voice close to her, and she heard in it the laugh he did not utter. "Mind you don't tumble in."

His hand touched her arm, closed upon it, drew her to his side. In another instant it encircled her, but she pushed him vehemently away and approached the boat.

"Let's go!" she demanded feverishly.

"Come along then," he said gayly.

"The boat is just here. You'll have to hold the flash light."

AS he pushed out from the bank he told her something of his arrangements.

"There's a motor waiting—not the one Polly usually hires, but it's quite a decent little car. By the way, she has gone to the city from Wynhampton. Said we could do our eloping best alone. We won't be quite alone, though, for Fricker is going to drive us. But he's a negligible quantity, eh? His only virtue is that he isn't afraid of driving in the dark."

"You will take me to Mrs. Lockyard?" Doris asked quickly.

"Of course. She is at her flat, she and Mrs. Fricker. We shall be there soon after midnight, all being well. Confound the rapids in this stream!"

He fell silent, and devoted all his attention to reaching the farther bank.

Doris sat with the flash light in her hands, striving desperately to control her nervous excitement. Her absence could not have been discovered yet, she was sure, but she was in a fever of anxiety notwithstanding. She would not feel safe until she was actually on the road.

The boat bumped at last against the bank and she drew a breath of relief. The journey had seemed interminable.

SUDDENLY through the windy darkness came the honk of an automobile horn.

"That's all right," Brandon said cheerily. "That's Fricker, wanting to know if all's well."

He hurried her over the wet grass, skirted the house by a side path that ran between dripping laurels, and brought her out finally into the little front garden.

A glare of lights met them abruptly as they emerged, dazzling them for the moment. The hum of a motor also greeted them, and a smell of gas hung in the wet air.

As her eyes grew accustomed to the brightness, Doris made out a small closed car, with a masked chauffeur seated at the wheel.

"Good little Fricker!" said Brandon, slapping the chauffeur's shoulder as he passed. "So you've got your steam up! Straight ahead, then, and as fast as you like. Look out for the speed cops, that's all."

He handed Doris into the car, followed her, and slammed the door.

The next moment they passed swiftly out onto the road, and Doris knew that the die was cast. She stood finally committed to this, the wildest, most desperate venture of her life.

"HERE beginneth," laughed Maurice, sliding his arm around the girl as she sat tense in every nerve gazing at the rain-blurred window.

Doris did not heed him; it was almost as if she had not heard. Her hands were tightly clasped and her face was turned from him.

There was no light inside the car. The only illumination came from those without, disclosing the driver huddled over the wheel but shedding little light into the interior.

Maurice tightened his arm about her, laying his other hand upon her clasped ones.

"Little girl, you're cold!" he said.

She was—cold as ice. She parted her fingers stiffly to free them from his grasp.

"I—I'm quite comfortable," she assured him, without turning her head. "Please don't trouble about me."

But he was not to be thus discouraged.

"You can't be comfortable," he argued. "Why, you're shivering. Let me see what I can do to make things better."

He tried to draw her to him, but she resisted almost angrily.

"Oh, do leave me alone! I'm not uncomfortable. I'm only thinking."

"Well, don't be silly!" he urged. "It's no use thinking at this stage. The thing is done now, and well done. We shall be man and wife by this time to-morrow. We'll go to Paris, eh, and paint the old town red?"

"Perhaps," she said, not looking at him or yielding an inch to his persuasion.

It was plain that, for some reason, she desired to be left in peace, and after a brief struggle with himself Brandon decided it would be wise to let her have her way. He leaned back and crossed his arms in silence.

The car sped along at a pace which he found highly satisfactory. He had absolute faith in Fricker's driving and knowledge of the roads.

THEY had been traveling for the greater part of an hour, when Doris at length relaxed from her tense attitude and lay back in her corner, nestling into it with a long shiver.

Brandon was instantly on the alert.

"I'm sure you are cold. Here's a rug. Let me—"

"Oh, do please leave me alone!" she said, with a sob. "I'm so horribly tired."

Almost beseechingly she laid her hand upon his arm.

The touch fired him. He considered that he had been patient long enough. Abruptly he caught her to him.

"Come, I say," he said, half laugh-

ing, half in savage earnest, "I can't have you crying on our honeymoon."

He certainly did not expect the absolutely furious resistance with which she met his action. She thrust him from her with all the strength of frenzy.

"How dare you?" she cried passionately. "How dare you touch me, you—you hateful cad?"

For the moment, such was his astonishment, he let her escape from his hold. Then, roused by her unreasoning fury, the devil in him leaped suddenly up and took possession. With a snarling laugh he gripped her arms, holding her by brutal force.

"You little wildcat!" he said in a voice that shook between anger and amusement. "So this is your gratitude, is it? I am to give all and receive nothing for my pains. Then let me make it quite clear to you here and now that that is not my intention. I will be kind to you, but you must be kind to me, too."

The statement was premature. In his heart he knew it, but she had provoked him to it and there was no turning back now. He resented the provocation, that was all, and it made him the more brutal.

As for Doris, she fought and tore at him like a mad creature until finally he mastered her.

Still laughing between his teeth, he forced her face upward and kissed it fiercely and violently. The girl shrieked between his kisses, shrieked and shrieked again.

A SUDDEN grinding of the brakes recalled Brandon to his senses.

That fool was actually stopping the car. He relinquished his hold upon the girl to dash his hand against the window in front.

"Drive on, curse you, drive on!" he shouted through the glass. "I'll let you know if we want to stop."

But the driver stopped in spite of him and, shining from head to foot in oilskins, sprang to the ground. A moment and he was at the door, had wrenched it open, and was peering within.

"What are you gaping here for, you fool?" raved Brandon, one hand upon Doris. "It's all right, I tell you. Go on."

"I am going on," the chauffeur responded calmly through his mask. "But I am not taking you any farther, Major Brandon. So get out, you dirty, thieving hound!"

The words, the tone, the attitude, flashed such a revelation upon Doris that she cried out in amazement.

Then with a revulsion of feeling so great that it temporarily deprived her of speech, she threw herself forward and clung to the masked chauffeur in an agony of tears.

Brandon was staring at the intruder with dropped jaw.

"Who—who are you?" he demanded.

"You know me, I think," the chauffeur responded quietly. He was pressing Doris back into her seat with absolute steadiness. "We have met before. I was present at your first wedding in New York ten years ago, and—as a junior counsel—I helped your bride to divorce you a few months after. My name is Brian Caldwell!"

He freed a hand to push up his mask. His pale face with its heavy-lidded eyes stared, supremely contemptuous, into Brandon's suffused countenance. His composure was disconcerting.

"Suppose you get out," he suggested. "I can talk to you then in a language you will understand."

"You go to—" bawled Brandon. "Where's Fricker?"

Brian shrugged his shoulders.

"You have seen him since I have. Are you going to get out? Ah, I thought you would."

Brian stood aside to allow him to do so, and then stepped back to shut the door. He did not utter a word to the girl cowering within; but that action of his was a mute command. She crouched in the dark and listened, but she did not dare to follow or to flee.

WHEN Brian came back to the motor a handkerchief was bound about the knuckles of his right hand, and his face wore a faint smile that had in it more of grimness than humor.

He paused at the open window and looked in on Doris without opening the door. The sound of the rain pattering heavily upon his shoulders filled in a silence that she found terrible. He spoke at length:

"You had better shut the window. The rain is coming in."

That was all, spoken in his customary drawl without a hint of anger or reproach. They cut her hard, those few words. It was as if he deemed her unworthy even of his contempt.

She raised her white face.

"What—are you going to do?" she managed to ask through her quivering lips.

"I am going to take you to a place just outside of Hartford—to spend the rest of the night. It is getting late, you know—'way past midnight."

"Hartford?" she echoed with a start. "Then—then we have come, pretty far, haven't we?"

"Yes," he answered briefly.

She glanced around. Her eyes were hunted.

"No," said Brian. "I haven't killed him. He is sitting on the roadside about fifty yards away, thinking things over."

Brian opened the door abruptly. Doris held her breath and became still and tense with apprehension. But he only pulled up the window, closed the door again with a sharp click, and left her. When she dared to breathe again the car was in motion.

She took no interest in her surroundings. Her destination had become a matter of such secondary importance that she gave it no consideration whatever.

What mattered, all that mattered, was that she was now in the hands and absolutely at the mercy of the man whom she feared as she feared no one else on earth—the man with whom in her mad coquetry she had dared to trifle.

THE car came to a standstill almost imperceptibly, and Brian stepped into the road.

Tensely she watched him; but he did not so much as glance her way. He turned aside to a little gate in a high hedge of laurel, and passed within, leaving her alone in the night.

Soon she heard his deliberate footfalls returning. In a moment he had reached the door, his hand was upon it. She turned stiffly toward him as it opened.

He spoke at once in his calm, un-moved voice:

"A very old friend of mine lives here. She will put you up for the night and see to your comfort. Will you get out?"

Mutely she did so, feeling curiously weak and unstrung. He put his arm around her, and led her into the dim cottage garden.

They went up a tiled path to an open door from which a light gleamed fitfully through the rain. She stumbled at the doorstep, but he held her up. He was almost carrying her.

As they entered, an old woman, bent and indescribably wrinkled, rose from her knees before a deep, old-fashioned fireplace on the other side of the little kitchen, and came to meet them. She had evidently just coaxed a dying fire back to life.

"Ah, poor dear!" she said at sight of the girl's exhausted face. "She looks more dead than alive. Bring her to the fire, Mr. Caldwell. I'll soon have some hot milk for the poor lamb."

Brian led her to an armchair that stood on one side of the blaze, and made her sit down. Then, stooping, he took one of her nerveless hands and held it closely within his own.

He did not speak to her, and Doris was relieved by his forbearance. As the warmth of his grasp gradually communicated itself to her numbed fingers, she felt her racing pulses grow steadier; but she was glad when he laid her hand down quietly in her lap and turned away.

He bent over her again in a few minutes with a cup of steaming milk. She took it, tasted it, and shuddered.

"There is brandy in it."

"Yes," said Brian.

She turned her head away.

"I don't want it. I hate brandy."

He put his hand on her shoulder.

"You had better drink it, all the same," he said.

She glanced at him, caught her breath sharply, then dumbly gave way. He kept his hand upon her while she drank, and only removed it to take the empty cup.

After that, standing gravely before her, he spoke again:

"I am going on into the city now with the car and I shall put up there. My old nurse will take care of you. I shall come back in the morning."

OLD Mrs. Maynard, sweeping her brick floor with wide open door through which the April sunlight streamed gloriously, nodded to herself a good many times over the doings of the night.

A very discreet creature was Mrs. Maynard, faithful to the very heart of her, but she would not have been mortal had she not been intensely curious to know what were the circumstances that had led Brian Caldwell to bring to her door that shrinking, exhausted girl who still lay sleeping in the room above.

When Doris awoke in response to her deferential knock, only the reticence of the trained servant greeted her. The motherliness of the night before had completely vanished.

Doris was glad of it. She had to steel herself for the coming interview with Brian; she had to face the result of her headlong actions with as firm a front as she could assume. She needed all her strength, and she could not have borne sympathy just then.

She thanked Mrs. Maynard for her attentions and was relieved to see her withdraw. Then, having nibbled very half-heartedly at the breakfast provided, she arose with a great sigh, and began to prepare for whatever might lie before her.

Dressed at length, she sat down by the open window to wait—and wonder.

The click of the garden gate fell suddenly across her meditations, and she drew back sharply out of sight.

Brian Caldwell was entering.

She heard his leisurely footfall on the tiles and then his quiet voice be-

low. Her heart began to thump with thick, uncertain beats. She was horribly afraid.

Yet when she heard the old woman ascending the stairs, she found courage to go to the door and open it.

Mr. Caldwell was in the parlor, she was told. He would be glad to see Miss Fielding at her convenience.

"I will go to him," she said, and forthwith descended the stairs.

HE was standing by the window when she entered, but wheeled round at once with his back to the light. She felt that this did not make much difference. She knew exactly how he was looking—cold, self-contained, implacable as granite. She had seldom seen him look otherwise.

His face was a perpetual mask to her. It was this very inscrutability of his that had first waked in her the desire to see him among her retinue of slaves.

She went forward slowly, striving to attain at least a semblance of composure. At first it seemed that he would wait for her where he was; then unexpectedly he moved to meet her. He took her hand into his own, and she shrank involuntarily. His touch unnerved her.

"You have slept?" he asked. "You are better?"

Something in his tone made her glance upward, catching her breath. But she decided instantly that she had been mistaken. He would not, he could not, mean to be kind at such a moment.

She made answer with an assumption of pride. She dared not let herself be natural just then.

"I am quite well. There was nothing wrong with me last night. I was only tired."

He suffered her hand to slip from his.

"I wonder what you think of doing," he said quietly. "Have you made any plans?"

The hot blood rushed to her face before she was aware of it. She turned it sharply aside.

"Am I to have a voice in the matter?" she said, her voice very low. "You did not think it worth while to consult me last night."

"You were scarcely in a fit state to be consulted," he answered gravely.

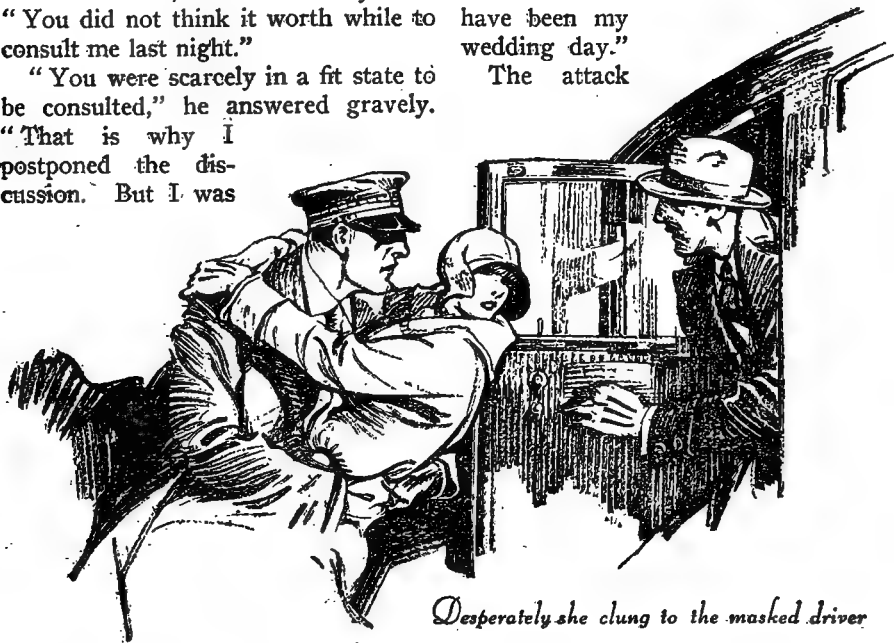
"That is why I postponed the discussion. But I was

"Yes, alone."

This time her voice rang defiance. She wheeled round, quivering from head to foot.

"But for you," she said, "but for your unwarrantable interference, I should never have been placed in this hateful, impossible position. I should have been with my friends in New York. It would have been my wedding day."

The attack



Desperately she clung to the masked driver

then—as I am now—entirely at your disposal. I will take you back to your people at once if you wish it."

SHE made a quick, passionate gesture of protest, and moved away from him.

"Have you any alternative in your mind?" he asked.

She remained with her back to him.

"I shall go away," she said, a sudden note of recklessness in her voice. "I shall travel."

"Alone?" he questioned.

was plainly unexpected. Even Brian was taken by surprise. But the next moment he was ready for her. He faced her.

"Then by all means," he said, "let me take you to your friends in New York. Doubtless your chivalrous lover has found his way there long before this."

She stamped like a little fury. Mad with anger and wounded pride.

"Do you think I would marry him—now? Do you think I would marry any one—after—after what happened

last night? Oh, I hate you—I hate all men!”

HER voice broke. Sobbing tempestuously, she sank into a chair.

Brian stood silent, biting his lip as if in irresolution. He did not try to comfort her.

After awhile, her weeping still continuing, he leaned across the table.

“Doris,” he said, “stop crying and listen to me. I know it is out of the question for you to marry that scoundrel whom I had the pleasure of thrashing last night. It always has been out of the question. That is one reason why I have been keeping such a hold upon you. Now that you admit the impossibility of it, I set you free. But you will be wise to think well before you accept your freedom from me. You are in an intolerable position, and I am quite powerless to help you unless you place yourself unreservedly in my hands and give me the right to protect you. It means a good deal, I know. It means, Doris, the sacrifice of your independence. But it also means a safe haven, peace, comfort, if not happiness. You may not love me. I never seriously thought you did. But if you will give me your trust—I shall try to be satisfied with that.”

Love! She had never heard the word on his lips before. It sent a curious thrill through her to hear it then. She had listened to him with her face hidden, though her tears had ceased. But as he ended, she slowly raised her head and looked at him.

“Are you asking me to marry you?”

“I am,” was the reply.

She lowered her eyes from his, and began to trace a design on the tablecloth with one finger.

“I don’t want to marry you,” she said at length.

“I know,” Brian responded.

She did not look up.

“No, you don’t know. That’s just it. You think you know everything. But you don’t. For instance, you think you know why I ran away with Major Brandon. But you don’t. You never will know—unless I tell you, probably not even then.”

She broke off with an abrupt sigh, and leaned back in her chair.

“ONE thing I do thank you for,” she said irrelevantly. “And that is that you didn’t take me back to Rivermead last night. Have they, I wonder, any idea where I am?”

“I left a message for your cousin,” the man answered.

“Oh, then he knew—”

“He knew that I had you under my protection,” Brian told her grimly. “I did not go into details. It was unnecessary. Only Fricker knew the details. I marked him down in the afternoon, after the incident at luncheon.”

She opened her eyes.

“Then you guessed—”

“I knew he did not find the missing glove under the table,” said Brian quietly. “I did not need any further evidence than that. I knew, moreover, that you had not devoted the whole of the previous afternoon to your correspondence. I was waiting for your cousin in the conservatory when you joined Brandon in the garden.”

She colored again vividly.

“And you—you were in the conservatory last night when I went through? I—I felt that some one was there.”

“Yes,” he answered. “I waited to see you go.”

“Why didn’t you stop me?”

For an instant her eyes challenged his.

He stood up, straightened himself slowly.

"It would not have answered my purpose," he told her steadily.

She stood up also, her face suddenly white.

"You chose this means of—of forcing me to marry you?"

"I chose this means—the only means to my hand—of opening your eyes," he said. "It has not perhaps been over successful. You are still blind to much that you ought to see. But you will understand these things better presently."

"Presently?" she faltered.

"When you are my wife," he said.

She flashed him a swift glance.

"I am to marry you then?"

"Will you marry me, Doris?"

She hesitated for a single instant, her eyes downcast. Then suddenly, without speaking, she put her hand into his, glad that, notwithstanding the overwhelming strength of his position, he had allowed her the honors of war.

AND so you were obliged to marry your persistent suitor after all!

My dear, it has been the talk of the town. Sit down and tell me all about it."

Doris's old friend, Mrs. Lockyard, laughed slyly at the girl's discomfiture.

"There isn't much to tell," said Doris. "We were married because we both wanted to."

Mrs. Lockyard laughed again, not very pleasantly.

"And left poor Maurice in the lurch? That was rather cruel of you, after all his chivalrous efforts to deliver you from bondage. And he so hard up, too."

A flush of anger rose in the girl's

face. She tilted her chin with the old proud gesture.

"I should not have married him in any case," she said. "He made that quite impossible by his own act. He—was not so chivalrous as I thought."

A gleam of malice shone for a moment in Mrs. Lockyard's eyes, and just a hint of it was perceptible in her voice as she responded.

"One has to make allowances sometimes. All men are not made after the pattern of your chosen lord and master. He, I grant you, is hard as granite and about as impassive. Still, I mustn't depreciate your prize since it was of your own choosing. Let me wish you instead every happiness."

"He was not impassive that night," said Doris quickly, with a sharp inward sense of injustice.

"No?" questioned Mrs. Lockyard.

"No. At least—Major Brandon did not find him so." Doris's blue eyes took fire at the recollection. "Brian gave him what was coming to him," she added with a certain exultation. "He thrashed him."

OH, my dear, he would have done that in any case. That was an old, old score paid off at last!

Forgive me for depriving you of this small gratification. But that debt was contracted many years ago when you were scarcely out of your cradle. Your presence was a mere incident. You were the opportunity, not the cause."

"I don't know what you mean," said Doris, looking her straight in the face.

"No? Well, my dear, it isn't my business to enlighten you. If you really want to know, I must refer you to your husband. Surely that is Mrs. Fricker over there. You will not mind if she joins us?"

"I am going!" Doris announced ab-

ruptly. "I really only looked in to see if there were any letters."

With determination she turned to the nearest door.

It was true that she had run into the club for her correspondence, but having met Mrs. Lockyard she had been almost compelled to linger.

Now from the depths of her soul Doris regretted the impulse that had borne her thither. She vowed to herself that she would not enter the club again so long as Mrs. Lockyard remained in town.

Three weeks had elapsed since her marriage, three impersonal weeks with Brian somewhere in the background.

He had been very kind on the whole, she was ready to admit, but she was farther from understanding him now than she had ever been. He had retired into his shell so completely that it seemed unlikely that he would ever again emerge, and she did not dare to make the first advance.

Her return to New York had been one of the greatest ordeals she had ever faced, but she had endured it unflinchingly, and had found that the metropolis had already almost forgotten the eccentricity of her marriage. In the height of the season memories are short.

Brian had taken an apartment on Riverside Drive and here they had settled down. He spent the greater part of his day at the law courts, and Doris found herself thrown a good deal upon her own resources. In happier days this had been her ideal, but for some reason it did not now content her.

RETURNING from her encounter with Mrs. Lockyard at the club, she told herself with sudden petulance that life in the city had lost all charm for her.

She entered the dainty sitting room that looked on to the Hudson, and dropping into a chair by the window, stared out with her chin cupped in her hands.

The river was a blaze of gold. A line of long, black barges was drifting down-stream in the wake of a noisy tug. She watched them absently, sick at heart.

Gradually the shining water grew blurred and dim. Its beauty wholly passed her by, or if she saw it, it was only in vivid contrast to the darkness in her soul.

For awhile, wide-eyed, she resisted the impulse that tugged at her heart-strings; but at last in sheer weariness she gave in. What did it matter, a tear more or less? There was no one to know or care. And tears were sometimes a relief. She bowed her head upon the sill and wept—

"Why, Doris!" a quiet voice said.

She started violently and sprang upright.

Brian was standing slightly behind her, his hand on the back of her chair, but as she rose he came forward and stood beside her.

"What is it?" he said. "Why are you crying?"

"I'm not!" she declared vehemently. "I wasn't! You—you startled me; that's all."

She turned her back on him and hastily dabbed her eyes. She was furious with him for having come upon her thus.

He stood at the window, looking out upon the long, black barges in silence.

After a few seconds of desperate effort she controlled herself and turned round.

"I didn't hear you come in. I—must have been asleep."

He did not look at her or attempt to refute the statement.

"I THOUGHT you were going to be out this afternoon," he said.

"So I was. So I have been. I went to the club to get my letters."

"Didn't you find any one there to talk to?" he asked.

"No one," she answered somewhat hastily; then, moved by some impulse she could not have explained: "That is, I saw Mrs. Lockyard."

"Doesn't she count?" asked Brian, still with his eyes on the river.

"I hate the woman!" Doris declared passionately.

He turned slowly round.

"What has she been saying to you?"

"Nothing."

Again he made no comment on the obvious lie.

"Look here," he said. "Can't we go out somewhere to-night? There is a new play on Broadway. They say it's good. Shall we go?"

The suggestion was quite unexpected; she looked at him in surprise.

"I have promised to dine with Vera," she said.

"Call her up and say you can't," Brian suggested.

She hesitated.

"I must make some excuse if I do. What shall I say?"

"Say I want you," he said, and suddenly that rare smile of his for which she had wholly ceased to look flashed across his face, "and tell the truth for once."

She did not see him again till she entered the dining room an hour later. He was waiting for her there, and as she came in he presented her with a spray of lilies.

In astonishment she looked at him.

"Don't you like them?" he asked.

"Of course I do. But—but—"

Her answer trailed off in confusion. Her lips quivered uncontrollably, and she turned quickly away.

BRIAN was plainly unaware of anything unusual in her demeanor. He talked throughout dinner in his calm, effortless drawl, and gradually, under its soothing influence, she recovered herself.

She enjoyed the play that followed. It was a simple romance, well staged, and superbly acted. She breathed a sigh of regret when it was over.

Driving home again with Brian, she thanked him impulsively for having taken her.

"You weren't bored?" he asked.

"Of course not," was the reply.

She would have said more, but something restrained her. A sudden shyness descended upon her that lasted till they reached home.

She left Brian at the outer door and turned into the room overlooking the Hudson. The window was open as she had left it, and the air blew sweetly upon her from over the water. She had dropped her wrap from her shoulders, and she shivered a little as she stood, but a feeling of suspense kept her motionless.

Brian had entered the room behind her. Doris wondered if he would pause at the table where a tray of refreshments was standing. He did not, and her nerves tingled and quivered as he passed it by.

He joined her at the window, where they stood together for several seconds looking out upon the great river with its myriad lights.

The girl had not the faintest idea what was passing in his mind, but her heartbeats quickened in his silence to

such a tumult that at last she could bear it no longer. She turned back into the room.

"Good night," she said almost inaudibly.

FOR a moment—no longer—her hand lay in his. She did not look at him. There was something in his touch that thrilled through her like an electric current.

But his grave "good night" had in it nothing startling, and by the time Doris reached her own room she had begun to ask herself what cause there had been for her agitation. She was sure he must have thought her very strange, very abrupt, even ungracious. And at that her heart smote her, for he had been kinder that evening than ever before. The fragrance of the lilies at her breast reminded her how kind.

She bent her head to them, and suddenly, as though the flowers exhaled some potent charm, an impulse—blind and domineering—took possession of her.

She turned swiftly to the door. In a moment her feet were bearing her, almost without her voluntary effort, back to the room she had left.

The door was unlatched. She pushed it open, entering impetuously. And she came upon Brian suddenly—as he had come upon her that afternoon—sunk in a chair by the window, with his head in his hands!

He rose instantly at her entrance, rose and closed the window. Then he lowered the blind quietly, very slowly, and finally turned round to her.

"What is it? You have forgotten something?"

For an instant she stood irresolute, afraid; then again that urging impulse drove her forward. She moved close to him.

"I only came back to say—I only wanted to tell you, Brian—I—I was horrid to you this afternoon. Forgive me!"

She stretched out her trembling hands to him, and he took them, held them fast, then sharply let them go.

"My dear," he said, "you were in trouble, and I intruded upon you. It was no case for forgiveness."

SHE drew a little nearer. Her fingers fastened, quivering upon his coat.

"You asked me this afternoon why I was crying," she explained. "And I—I lied to you. You asked me, too, what Mrs. Lockyard said to me. And I lied again. I will tell you now, if—if you will listen to me."

Brian was still holding her hands.

"Well?" he asked quietly. "What did she say?"

"She said"—Doris spoke with an effort—"she said, or rather she hinted, that there was an old grudge between you and Major Brandon, a matter with which I was in no way concerned, an affair of many years' standing. She said that was why you followed him up and—thrashed him that night. She implied that I didn't count at all. She made me wonder if—if—" She was speaking almost inarticulately, with bent head. "If perhaps it was only to satisfy this ancient grudge that you married me."

Her words went into silence. She could not look him in the face. If he had not held her hands so firmly, she would have been tempted to turn and flee. As it was, she could only stand before him in quivering suspense.

He moved at length, suddenly and disconcertingly, freeing one hand to turn her face quietly upward. Doris did not resist him, but shrank as she met

his eyes. She fancied she had never seen him look so grim.

AND that was why you were crying?" he asked, deliberately searching her reluctant eyes.

"That was—one reason," the girl acknowledged faintly.

"Then there was something more than that?"

"Yes."

She laid her hand pleadingly on his arm, and he released her.

"I will tell," she said tremulously, keeping her face upturned to his. "At least, I will try. But it's very difficult because—"

She began to falter under his look.

"Because," he said slowly, "you have no confidence in me. That I can well understand. You married me more or less under compulsion; and when a wife is no more than a guest in her husband's house, confidence between them, of any description, is almost an impossibility."

He spoke without anger, but with a sadness that pierced her to the heart.

"I will tell you," he continued, his voice very quiet and even, "exactly what Mrs. Lockyard was hinting at. Ten years ago I was engaged to a girl—like you in many ways—gay, impulsive, beautiful. I was very young in those days; romantic, too. I worshiped her as a goddess. I was utterly blind to her failings; they simply did not exist for me.

"She rewarded me by running away with Maurice Brandon. I knew he was a blackguard, but how much of a blackguard I did not realize till later. However, I didn't trust him even then. I followed them and insisted that they should be married in my presence. Six months later I heard from her. He had treated her abominably, had final-

ly deserted her, and she was trying to get a divorce. I did my best to help her, and eventually she obtained it." He paused for a moment, then went on with bent head, "I never saw her after she gained her freedom. She went to her people, and very soon after—she died."

Again he paused, reminiscently.

I NEVER cared for any woman after that," he went on, "until I met you. As for Brandon, he kept out of my way, and I had no object in seeking him. In fact, I took no interest in his doings till I found that you were in Mrs. Lockyard's set. That, I admit, was something of a shock. And then when I found that you liked the man—"

"Oh, don't!" she broke in. "Don't! I was mad ever to tolerate him. Let me forget it! Oh, please let me forget!"

She spoke passionately, and as if her emotion drew him he turned fully round to her.

"If you could have forgotten him sooner," he said, with a touch of sternness, "you would not find yourself tied to a man you never loved."

The effect of his words was utterly unexpected. Doris started as one stricken, wounded in a vital place, and clasped her hands tightly against her breast, crushing the flowers that drooped there.

"It is a lie!" she cried wildly. "It is a lie!"

Her face was working convulsively. She turned and moved unsteadily away from him, groping out before her as she went. So groping, she reached the door and blindly sought the doorknob. But before she found it he spoke in a tone that had subtly altered:

"Look at me!"

Doris slowly threw back her head and met his eyes. She was sobbing like a child that has been hurt.

He bent toward her searchingly.

"So," he said, "it was a lie, was it? But, my own girl, how was I to know? Why didn't you say so before?"

She broke into a laugh that had in it the sound of tears.

"How could I? You never asked. How could I?"

"Shall I ask you now?"

She stretched up her arms and clasped his neck.

"No," she whispered back. "Take me—take everything—for granted. It is the only way, if you want to turn a heartless little flirt like me into—a worthwhile wife!"

And so, clinging to him, her lips met his in the first kiss that had ever passed between them.



Mistletoe Mysteries

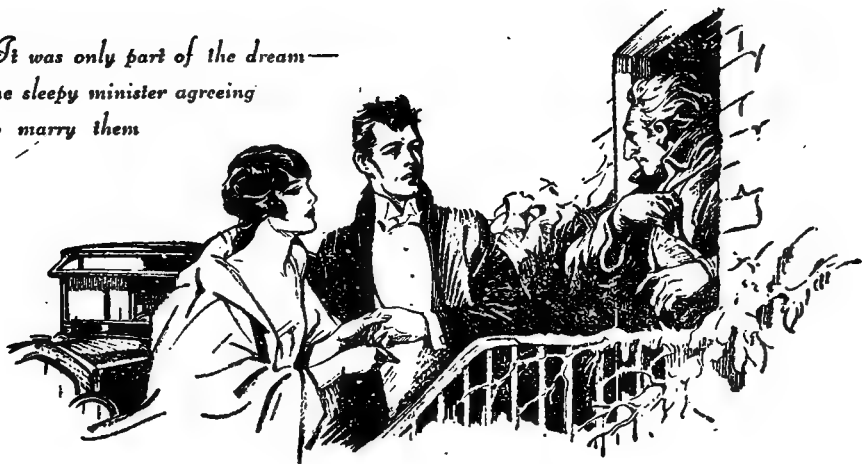
CHRISTMAS is a holiday
As even dullards know!
Each one on this jolly day
Stops and rests, and so
You see no one is working now—
Except the mistletoe.

It always works. If you will peer
'Neath almost any chandelier
In any hamlet one might mention
You'll see the truth of my contention.

And to accentuate the crime,
It's even working overtime!

—Mary Carolyn Davies.

*It was only part of the dream—
the sleepy minister agreeing
to marry them*



Her Happiest Christmas

*Some girls get watches or diamond rings, some
get cheques . . . Sue got the best
Christmas gift of all*

By Donna Ashworth

AT sight of the laughing pair who had just passed her on the street, Sue Wrigley turned abruptly and began staring at the window, winking back the tears that had suddenly misted her eyes. She couldn't bear the sight of Dick and his new girl, laughing as they hurried down the street together.

Dick was so attractive, so handsome; she loved him so much, loved his laugh, his tenderness, the twinkle in his blue eyes, his tawny yellow hair, his fine and deep rumbling voice. It hadn't

seemed real, Dick's loving her, for she had dreamed of something like that always. Then suddenly he had dropped her for this new girl, dropped her without explanation or excuse, without even letting her have the privilege of a quarrel. She had had to endure it, had to act as if she didn't care when her heart was breaking. She couldn't let everybody know how much he had hurt her.

It wouldn't have been quite so hard if it hadn't happened just before Christmas. And it was going to be such a

miserable Christmas without Dick, for she had nobody. She had dreamed of a Christmas with Dick taking her to a Christmas dance, with Dick laughing by her side. And now this—the loneliness, bitterness, despair, and heartbreak of knowing that he no longer cared.

She had never had beaux like other girls. He was the first to come and make her lonely life endurable. Always her eager feet had longed to dance, but there had been nobody to take her. She had wanted to be part of a laughing crowd, who had dinners together, and danced afterward, and for a little while Dick had opened that precious gateway. She had been Dick's girl, and his friends had opened the door to let her in. Life had been so good those glorious months through the summer and fall, and she hadn't believed the girls at the office when they said Dick was fickle. She had loved him too much. But now—

"HELLO, Sue! Hunting Christmas presents?" A laughing voice spoke beside her.

"Yes." She forced a laugh as she turned to face Mary Howell. Her quick glance noted the other girl's expensive black coat, her nobby green hat with her golden red hair showing beneath it, her smiling blue eyes and scarlet mouth.

Beside Mary, Sue always felt plain and ordinary. She drew her brown coat more closely about her. Her own mouth was soft and red, revealing shining white teeth when she smiled, and she had an impudent turned up nose, only she was never impudent. Soft brown curls crept out from beneath her blue felt hat which made her eyes bluer than usual.

"I'm such a silly creature, Mary. I'm wishing the most foolish things.

For instance, I want that enormous teddy-bear with the big blue bow."

"Silly girl! Come on, I'll show you something a lot more interesting than that. You should have been a mother with sixteen children, then you would have been kept busy at Christmas. But isn't that a lovely window? Children have so many things nowadays. Where were you going?"

"I was on my way to the bank." Sue gave a last fleeting look toward the window filled with Christmas toys, and followed Mary down the street.

"I want to show you the most adorable dress! It's in the Style Shop window." Mary was bubbling with eagerness. "It's just a dream. I think I'll go in and try it on, because I simply must have a new evening dress or two for the Christmas dances. Here it is."

Sue's breath caught in her throat as they stopped before the Style Shop window. She had never seen a dress so lovely. It had a tight fitting bodice, with a perfectly gorgeous flower on the shoulder, a full skirt, quite long, and laced with the same exquisite sort of flowers. It was made of cloth of gold.

"Oh, it's too gorgeous for words! Wouldn't it be beautiful with gold slippers? Mary, I think you'd be lovely in that! Why, it's a dream dress! I've dreamed of one like that all my life!"

"Why don't you get it then? I know it isn't terribly expensive—their dresses never are—and you'd be darling in it, Sue. Aren't you going to the Christmas dances?"

A sob filled her throat, but she pushed it down resolutely. Mary mustn't know how much she wanted to. She laughed a little chokingly. "No, not this year. I—I rather thought I might; Dick always goes you know, but

he has another girl now, so I guess I won't get to it after all."

"But there are other men, Sue! My goodness, Dick isn't the only man in the world!"

Mary looked at her sharply. She liked Sue better than most anybody, and it made her furious for Dick to treat her like that. He had liked her, Mary knew. Marion Wilson had just turned his head. But he had no business treating Sue like that, dropping her just before Christmas.

"There may be." Sue forced a laugh. "But I don't know them. And as for the dress, you go and get it, Mary. It'll be perfect with your hair."

"Well, if you're not going to, I do believe I'll try it on. I know it would fit either one of us, we're so near the same size. See you Monday."

SUE walked on down the street, a sob in her throat. Mary had everything. She liked her; and yet at this moment she hated her, for she wanted that dress more than anything in the world. It would make her over. She hated Dick, too, because it was his fault she couldn't have it. She had dreamed of going to the Christmas dances, but now—The thought of Mary persisted, Mary and Ned.

Sue and Mary worked in the same office, but it seemed that Mary had everything she did not have. She was surfeited with relatives, an adoring father and mother, friends, plenty of money, and she was engaged to Ned. Mary did not have to work. She did it because she wanted to, and she seemed to get so much out of life. She would go to all the Christmas dances, and wear lovely evening dresses, and be made much of, and at home there would be all sorts of lovely presents,

and a wonderful present from Ned, and a big family dinner, and—

Sue did not want to think about it. She was called efficient. She had an excellent position, but there were times when she did not want to remember her efficiency. At Christmas time she wanted to be loved, and adored, and worshiped. Listening each day to the gossip in the office, to the laughter and plans and dreams of those who were going home for Christmas, she realized each day more poignantly that there was nobody to care what she did.

If she was miserable, nobody cared. She wanted the dream dress, but she couldn't have it for that very reason. She couldn't afford to buy it, just to hang it up in the closet. She wanted to wear it, and laugh, and be happy. Well, something else would just have to take the place of that joyful Christmas she had dreamed about.

Suddenly the idea was born!

Perhaps it was the brown teddy-bear that inspired it. She would have a Christmas of her own, a family of her own, and one Christmas would be exactly as she wished. She didn't need a fiancé to do it. She thought of Ned, tall, handsome, laughing Ned, who was engaged to Mary, and a sob filled her throat. Some girls had everything.

But there was only one thing which was absolutely essential to the thing she wanted right now, and that was the bonus check in her pocketbook, plus six little orphans of different ages. Why had she never thought of it before? She dashed into the bank and deposited the check, her eyes alight.

HURRYING out, she sped toward a big white house set back behind cedar and elm trees with a wide lawn and a winding driveway. It was a friendly house, and here she

lived as a companion to Jane Wright, who rented her a room, so she would not be so lonely at night. Only a week ago Aunt Jane, as Sue called her, had told her that none of her children were coming home for Christmas. She had listened and said nothing. She had not thought, then, that Aune Jane's Christmas might be quite as lonely as her own.

"Oh, Aunt Jane!" She laughed as she dashed into the house. "I have the most heavenly idea, and I need you to help me put it over. It's four days from now until Christmas, and I want to rent your whole house for that length of time. I'm going to adopt me a family of orphans for Christmas!"

Jane Wright was an old lady. Her hair was thin, and very white, and she wore a white lace cap, but her wrinkled face lighted up, and her gray eyes twinkled behind their glasses, as she listened.

"Why child, you can have my house if you want it. I was just thinking how lonely it was going to be with none of the children or grandchildren at home." Her eyes grew misty. "Christmas isn't Christmas, honey, if you don't have somebody that belongs to you."

Sue, still laughing-eyed, flung off her hat as she dropped down on the footstool before the fireplace, and her voice was vibrant with eagerness.

"That's just what I know, 'Aunt Jane, and I'm going to adopt me six children for Christmas. I just thought what a wonderful house this would be to have Christmas in. I've always been miserable at Christmas time, because I never had anybody to care—" She swallowed a sob that welled up in her throat, and a smile trembled about her lips—"but I'm not going to be miserable this year. I'm going to be so busy

I won't have time to be. I'm going to buy a raft of toys, and we'll have to see about beds, and we'll get a turkey and all the fixings, and—" She paused for breath. "I'm so excited!"

THE next four days were days of wild activity for Sue. At the office, she told her fellow workers of her plan, and she was greeted with shouts of laughter. Mary and Gladys and Ora especially made fun of her, but she did not mind very much.

"I don't care." She held her head high. "You've never been lonely, and it isn't funny, being lonely, and I don't see anything funny in having to adopt a family for Christmas, just because you don't happen to have one!"

Aunt Jane had the house all spick and span and shining, beds all ready for the six little visitors. Ellen, who had cooked Christmas dinner for years and years, was in the kitchen, planning and bubbling over with enthusiasm too. She would fix everything just as she had fixed it when Aunt Jane's children were at home, and she brought in her niece Maggy to help Aunt Jane with the house, and Jerry said he would keep the fireplace filled, and the furnace going at full blast so the house would be warm all over.

Was ever such a Christmas planned? And did nature ever make such a wonderful Christmas Eve? Snow falling in soft glistening flakes. Lights shining from windows. Laughter on the streets. Shouts. Gay voices. The tinkle of bells on hurrying cars.

Sue, with the six kiddies adopted for Christmas all piled in a taxi, sped from the orphanage to the big white house.

They all walked in primly, a little frightened, hanging back, but Aunt Jane talked to them as they looked won-

der-eyed at the big comfortable room and the sparkling fire. It seemed but a moment until fear left them, and they were jumping up and down on the davenport and chasing the cat, shouting as they played.

The house was filled with excited laughter.

After supper they all gathered in the living room beside the fireplace, and the children popped corn over the glowing coals. The tree stood in the corner, all sparkling with red and silver, and green balls, and twinkling lights, all strung with tinsel and popcorn, with a bright silver star at the top. The firelight made it glisten and shine, and made the corners dark, with only the circle of light about those gathered together.

Sue held the littlest orphan close, head against her breast. She was only two. Sue wanted to keep her always, but to-morrow they would all have to go back. She met Aunt Jane's eyes, and her own were misty. So many years had passed since Aunt Jane had sat beside that fireplace with her own children about her!

SUDDENLY the door bell pealed loudly through the house, startling them, and arousing the sleeping child.

"I'll answer it." Aunt Jane was on her feet.

Laughing voices echoed in the hall.

"Oh Sue, we came to see how you and your family were! Look, everybody! Behold the mother instinct! Can you imagine?"

Mary stood in the doorway, radiantly lovely in a pale green chiffon evening dress, her black velvet coat thrown open, her feet encased in silver slippers, her head up. Beside her stood Ned, and with them Gladys, dressed in

an evening frock of silver, and Ora in one of blue. The three girls who worked in her office, and who had made the most fun of her Christmas idea, had come to laugh! They were all three engaged to the men who stood beside them, and they had relatives and to spare. They had never known loneliness.

Sue saw that there was another man with them, a stranger, whom she did not know, and she felt his eyes upon her.

She was on her feet, clinging to the baby who lay in her arms, half awake, dreamy-eyed. The firelight caught her hair, and played across her face. A sob filled her throat, and suddenly she hated them all.

The children, frightened, gathered more closely about her, for the oldest was only seven, and the strangers startled them. But Mary's mocking laughter was all that Sue heard, and she was filled with fury. She knew that Mary didn't really mean to hurt her, that she was just thoughtless, and it had probably not occurred to her that there was anything to be hurt about. To her it was a good joke, but Sue could not be silent.

"You're cruel, Mary."

The tears crept into her eyes, and she knew they were streaming down her cheeks, but she could not stop them, for she had the child in her arms. She faced them, her head up, striving to stop the trembling of her voice.

"You're cruel! I—I wouldn't try to hurt you, or laugh at your dreams. I wouldn't laugh at you because you were trying to make believe, because you were trying to find somebody to love at Christmas time—because you were lonely! I wouldn't go out of my way to show you how much I had, how secure I was with my relatives, and

friends, and everything—I—I wish you'd go—I—I—"

She turned her back to them suddenly. She could find no more words, and she could not have spoken any-way.

"Oh Sue, dear!" Mary was beside her, her arm about her shaking shoulders. "We were just teasing." Her head was close down to hers— "I—I think it's perfectly lovely for you to take these darlings and give them a Christmas, and I've just envied you these last few days, because I—I wouldn't have the courage to do anything like that, and it's something so much more worthwhile than anything I've ever done in my whole life— But they're all going to be sent off to bed, pronto, and you're going to the dance with us! That's what we came by for, to take you to the dance, not to laugh, you sweet sensitive thing—"

"Oh—" Sue was trying to blink back the tears. "I'd love to, and I'm so sorry—I—I was so cross, but I—" She didn't try to explain further. There wasn't any use in explanations. Mary understood. "And I'd love to go to the dance, but I haven't anything to wear."

Mary smiled importantly.

"I was afraid you'd use that for an excuse, so I brought along a dress. See the bag my beloved Ned's holding onto like grim death, and that wrap that Ora's hanging onto in the same manner? Clothes will not answer for an excuse, and John, Ned's cousin is a dear— Come on, I want you to meet him. He's too sweet! We'll all help

you." She tucked Sue's hand beneath her arm and led her to the others.

SUE had a hazy impression of being introduced to the dark-eyed man in the shadow, and then Mary was announcing in her high laughing voice:

"Everybody get busy! Grab a child, each one of you, and fly upstairs with it, and put it to bed. Santa Claus won't come, if they are not in bed in ten minutes. We'll give a prize to the one who gets his or her child tucked in first."

Such a scurrying and hustling about as there was, with Aunt Jane superintending it all! Sue laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks as the three men, entering into the spirit of the game, valiantly struggled to undress a child and put it to bed. The girls were surprisingly expert, and almost

before it really could have happened, six little orphans were all tucked in bed, and everybody but Mary and Sue were being chased downstairs to wait, while Sue dressed.

Things were happening so fast Sue didn't even protest. She just let herself be carried along. How had she ever been cross with Mary? They were in her bedroom, and she was wriggling out of the clothes she had on, and into others as fast as she could.

"Oh Mary, tell me how it all happened?" She gasped, as she slipped into her underwear. "What about John?"

"He just dropped in from the sky." Mary was pulling the suit case open.



"He was flying home to St. Louis, wanted to get there for Christmas, but they got caught in this blizzard, and the plane couldn't make it, so they landed here. He just got in an hour ago. Ned called me and wanted me to find him a girl. You popped into my mind. I knew you weren't planning on going to the dances, from what you'd said that day, and I remembered what you said about the dress too. I was planning to wear it to the New Year's dance, so I brought it along for you to-night."

"Oh!" Sue looked at her with shining eyes. "Oh Mary, it's my dream dress! You're the sweetest girl I ever knew in my life. Why, I—I never had such a Christmas before— I—I didn't know such wonderful things could really happen."

She was slipping the dress over her head, and her eyes were glistening with happy tears as she looked at her own reflection.

"Ned said if my slippers didn't fit, he'd go by the store, and unlock it, and get you some that would. But I told him we were just about the same size."

"Oh, yes, they're perfect—perfect!"

"You're lovely!" Mary stood away and surveyed her with critical eyes. "But you're not dashing enough." She reached for her own make-up box, which she had brought along, and began applying lipstick to Sue's lips. She added more rouge to her cheeks, a deft shadow beneath her eyes, length to her eye lashes—

She watched the transformation through astounded eyes. She had never made the most of herself before. That girl couldn't really be her. For the girl in the glass was beautiful, her soft brown hair curling about her face, her eyes starry blue beneath long curling lashes, her lips, lovely as a fresh blown rose, parted in a smile. Slim

and straight she stood there, a fairy princess in a golden gown and shining golden slippers.

"If you don't knock Dick's eyes out to-night!" Mary closed her make-up box swiftly.

"Dick!" Sue gasped a little breathlessly. "Dick!"

"Yes, silly. I'm not blind. Haven't I been watching you eating your heart out for him. I don't know why; but if you're crazy enough about him, you can have him to-night, if you'll take him. I'm going to tell you something on the Q. T. Dick always wants to do the ditching. He's horribly jealous. And he's crazy over Marion because somebody else wanted her. He likes you really better than anybody, but there wasn't any excitement in the chase. But to-night he's going to want you worse than he ever did before, because, well, John Graydon is a rival any day in the week."

WHEN they came down the stairs John Graydon was on his feet, laughing down into her eyes, catching up the green velvet coat with the huge white fur collar that Mary had brought, and wrapping it deftly about her.

Sue drew in her breath excitedly. Aunt Jane was watching her through eager eyes. Then they were all going out of the house, laughing and talking together, John Graydon beside her, his hand against her arm, murmuring compliments. They were outside, the snow falling in fleecy white flakes as they ran for Ned's big car. A moment later they were swirling through the night. Miracles did happen, Sue kept telling herself, as if she couldn't yet believe.

Music. Laughter. Dancing feet. The biggest Christmas dance of the year at the Country Club. Gay Christ-

mas decorations. Mistletoe on chandeliers, tiny Christmas trees glittering with colored lights and tinsel. Youth and age dancing.

Sue came out of the dressing room, shining eyed, aware of her own loveliness. She looked up in John Graydon's brown eyes, a smile on her lips. His arm was about her, and they swung into step. She hadn't known anybody could dance like that.

"Oh you lovely, lovely thing!" He was laughing down into her eyes. "You're a dream girl."

She hadn't been used to men saying things like that to her, not even Dick, when he said he loved her. He had never called her lovely.

Mary's words came back to her swiftly. "Act like you're crazy about John, absolutely crazy about him. I'll tell all the rest that he's your beau from far off. He won't mind. It'd please him if he were. He hasn't been able to take his eyes from you. And don't give Dick a look in."

Why should she, Sue thought, laughing as she danced in John Graydon's arms, light as thistledown, gay in her golden gown. There were other men in the world.

She looked up startled, for Dick was dancing by with Marion.

Sue eyed her critically. She was a pretty girl in a slim jade green frock, her black hair perfectly marcelled, her scarlet lips laughing, her brown eyes shining, but not as pretty as she was, Sue knew. She danced on, her lips parted in a smile. She had never been so happy in her life.

THE first dance was ended. Sue stopped, smiling up into John's face. There was a pause between dances. Slipping her hand into his arm, she walked slowly down the room,

looking up at him through her lashes. It wasn't that he was so handsome, but there was something distinguished about his lean, well built figure, his long thin face, his laughing brown eyes, his smooth shining black hair, his smiling mouth, the way he wore his clothes. More than one feminine heart fluttered at the sight of him. But he was quite oblivious to every one else in the room but Sue.

"Who are they?" more than one person was asking.

"Somebody with Ned Graham's party," was the answer.

"They're crazy about each other." Mary was whispering with the instinct of a born match-maker.

"Who is that with Sue?" Dick and Marion came up beside Mary.

"That's John Graydon from St. Louis. He's perfectly mad about her, and I think she is about him. Isn't Sue lovely? Love can certainly transform a person."

Dick was looking after her with furious eyes as she strolled along, laughing up into John Graydon's face. Why, she had said she loved him! Fickle, that was what she was. She couldn't love anybody for any length of time. He had quite forgotten that he was the fickle one.

He moved toward her. "May I have this dance, Sue?"

Sue looked up at him swiftly, sudden laughter in her eyes. She had never seen Dick look like that before, irritated and worried, frowning a little, his blue-gray eyes cloudy. He had hurt her, but now she could laugh, and Mary had given her her cue.

"I have this one with Ned."

"The next one then?"

"I have it with John."

"The next one?"

"Sam has it."

"Are you booked for the whole evening?" he snapped furiously, as he looked at her standing there, her scarlet lips parted in a smile, her eyes shining. How lovely she was, and yet so aloof, and indifferent, as if he did not matter at all to her, as if he had never mattered!

It was that dress that made her so exquisite. Why hadn't he known she could be like that, look like that? He had liked her better than any girl he had ever known, liked the sweetness and the dearness of her, but she had been such a little brown mouse. But to-night—she was different, no longer clinging, needing him, wanting him, and he wanted her more than he had ever wanted anybody in his life. It was clear enough that the fellow beside her was in love with her.

"Just about." She laughed, then, a trifle dazed at her own words. "There may be an extra or two, though."

To think that she could act like that, when she'd been crying her heart out for Dick for a whole month! But she wasn't going to let him know.

THE music drifted on and on. The evening waned. Sue laughed with delicious enjoyment. She had not known it was such a happy world.

"The next is an extra," somebody was saying.

Dick was sliding across the floor to her. "This is mine." He spoke almost savagely as he swept her into his arms.

"What's that fellow to you?" he demanded suddenly.

"Oh, John?" She smiled lazily into his eyes. "He's everything. Isn't he a dear?"

"I'm glad you think so. Is it true that you're going to marry him? Mary says he's frightfully rich, and—"

"I—I don't see that it's any of your

business what I do." There was an angry light in her eyes.

"It is my business." They were opposite the main door of the clubhouse. He glided nearer. And almost before she was aware of what was happening, he had flung it open. She felt the night wind sweeping about her, snow against her face, and Dick was swinging her up into his arms. His head bent against the wind, he was running down the driveway through the falling snow.

"Dick! Are you mad? What are you doing?" Furiously she struggled against him, but she might as well have struggled against arms of iron.

"Yes, about you!" he snapped back. He flung the door of the coupé open and pushed her in, slamming it shut, and turning the key in the lock. Then he was around on the other side, at the wheel, pulling a robe up about her feet.

"But what—what are you going to do?" She whispered wildly, shivering. She had never seen Dick like that.

"Bring you to your senses if I can." He answered as he started the car, and swung it out toward the highway.

"Dick! Let me out! Let me out!" she pleaded. "Please, Dick! What are you going to do?"

"I don't know! I don't know except that I'm going to get you away from that Graydon. I've stood all I can stand this evening, watching you dancing with him, the look in his eyes as if he owned you, the way he kissed you there in the alcove. Yes, I saw that, too. But he can't have you! You're mine." He pulled the car to a stop and caught her close, his lips flaming against her mouth, his arms crushing the breath out of her.

"Oh, Dick! Don't!" She pounded against him with her fists. He didn't even seem to know she struggled.

"Don't!" He looked down at her, his eyes blazing into hers. "You didn't used to feel that way. You used to like me a little!"

"But you're hurting me, Dick! I can't get my breath!" And suddenly she broke into a torrent of tears. "And you didn't care! You didn't love me any more!"

"Love you! I'm mad about you! I—I guess I just didn't know it until to-night, when I thought about somebody else having you, my lovely, lovely, Sue in your golden gown. I didn't realize how crazy I was about you. Oh sweetheart, you do care a little, you'll marry me?"

"But—" She was struggling for time.

"Promise." He searched her face for his answer.

"Take me back," she begged swiftly, "and let me decide. I—I don't know."

"I won't take you back until you say yes." His mouth was set in grim, hard lines. "You've got to promise! I'll never risk losing you again. Never!"

"But I don't know." She flung the mist from her eyes, biting her quivering lips to stop their trembling. "I don't know."

"You've got to know." He released her abruptly, and started the car.

"Where are you going, Dick?" She whimpered suddenly, catching his arm.

"To Blythevale, where we can get a marriage license. You're too fickle. I see you aren't going to make up your mind, so I'll make it up for you."

"No! No!" Sue cried wildly, her fingers struggling with the door. "I don't want to get married to-night." She, too, was thinking of that moment there behind the palms when John Graydon had swept her close in his

arms and kissed her. "John—I—I can't—"

"John!" He glared his answer.

"And I'm cold."

He stopped long enough to wrap the robe about her shaking shoulders, and the car sped on. Her pleading had no effect, nor her tears. He was quite as inexorable as fate.

AT Blythevale he stopped at the County Clerk's house, a man whom he happened to know, and by some magic prevailed upon him to go to the court house and make out a license. Sue wondered how much extra he must have paid him. Then with that same determination, Dick aroused a minister from sleep.

She had to laugh to herself as she went into the minister's house, her hair flying in the wind, her golden gown showing beneath the red and green of the robe which she had wrapped about her like an Indian. What a picture she must make! And she didn't really want to get married.

It was just a blur of unreality, part of the queerly magic night which swept her on. She stood there, the minister's wife and eighteen-year-old daughter witnesses to the unreality of it, the mirror reflecting another girl's image, a girl with proudly lifted head, curling tendrils of brown hair, starry eyes, and soft scarlet lips, a slim white throat above a golden evening gown, who murmured the words of a marriage ceremony in a trembling voice.

Dick had caught her close in his arms, and his lips burned against hers. That was real, that part, Dick holding her close like that.

"Now, he can never have you," he was saying with savage delight.

Dimly, she heard the clock striking. Two o'clock.

"Heavens!" she cried suddenly, "my children, Dick! I've got to fix their Christmas presents. Oh, I think I've been mad, I've forgotten them!"

"Children!"

The minister and his wife looked at each other strangely. Were they insane, these two? This lean, handsome man without an overcoat or hat, with the thermometer close to zero, and this exquisite girl, as lovely as a flower in her golden gown, using as a wrap a green and red motor robe. But their daughter looked at them through shining eyes. In all her eighteen years she had never known anything as romantic as this wild Christmas marriage at two o'clock in the morning.

"Children!" exclaimed Dick, surveying her in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Yes," Sue laughed weakly—"Yes—I adopted six orphans for Christmas, and I had forgotten all about them."

IT was three o'clock in the morning when Dick pulled the car to a halt, and laughing, his arm about Sue, ran into the house. The fire had almost burned out, but he piled on more wood, and they watched it blaze up.

Then swiftly, talking in low, gasping, laughing voices, they set to work. There were packages to be untied, and stockings to be filled to bursting with nuts and candy and popcorn and oranges, to prove that Santa Claus had really come down the chimney. There were roller skates, trains, fire wagons, dolls, drums, everything a child could dream about, and last but not least, a golden brown teddy-bear with a huge blue bow on his neck!

It was finished at last. There was nothing more to be done. It was all unreal to Sue, the tree standing there so tall and straight and glittering, Dick

there helping her, just as she had dreamed.

She looked at him suddenly, realization sweeping over her. She had married him. He was hers, and she would never be lonely again. There was some one who cared. She would love Mary the rest of her life. Dumbly, she wondered if she had found her wrap in the dressing room, what John Graydon thought. He had been nice. She had liked him so much. But after all—

She moved toward the fireplace, and stood there before the dying fire.

"And what did Santa Claus bring you, sweetheart?" Dick asked, moving toward her, feasting his eyes on her loveliness as she stood there, the firelight shimmering on her golden gown, her eyes shining, her lips parted in an eager, joyous smile.

"My dream dress—" Sue whispered softly, her fingers against its shining folds.

"Yes, sweetheart, your dream dress, that makes you look like a fairy princess, and what else?" He moved nearer, his arms were about her, drawing her gently to him. "What else, my little dream girl?"

"You, Dick, the best Christmas gift of all. Oh Dick, I love you so!" She swayed a little, lifting her flower-like face to his, happy tears in her eyes. "Hold me, Dick, and don't ever let me go—*ever*."

He swept her off her feet, his lips against hers, and they quite forgot that it was Christmas time; that outside the snow had stopped falling and the Christmas stars had come out; that six little orphans were sleeping upstairs and dreaming of what Santa Claus would bring them; that the fire was almost burned out, and that the clock was striking four. They were only aware of each other.



"Barney!" she cried joyously

Hearts In Hollywood

Is fame worth the price of love renounced? Amy thought it was—

By Marjorie Gleyre

AMY LECLARE sat at one side of the set, on a rickety camp stool, chewing the end of a pencil and puckering her smooth white forehead into ridges of thought. Her attention was given so completely to the paper on her lap that she was quite oblivious of the bustle going on around her in the studio.

Dan McGinnis, the camera man, noticed her first, and snapped his fingers softly to attract the attention of the others without disturbing Amy.

Ted Rooks, the director; Jimmy, his

assistant, and Tracy Overton, the publicity man, all looked up and grinned appreciatively.

Ted motioned and winked, whereupon they gathered quietly behind Amy's back to peek and see what she found so absorbing.

"My eye!" exploded Jimmy, and read aloud, "'Furnished Heart to let; ready to welcome a desirable tenant; warm, active, loving; triflers need not apply.' Wow!"

"Whoopee!" shouted Dan hilariously. "Line forms to the right."

"Say, Amy, what's the racket?" asked Ted.

Amy, having started guiltily at the interruption, flushed as she looked up into their interested, jeering faces.

"It pays to advertise!" she retorted saucily.

"You don't need to advertise," said Ted; "here's a tenant who'll take a ninety-nine year lease any time you say."

"Home talent need not apply," she scorned.

"Say, sister," advised Tracy seriously, "I'm handling your publicity, remember. If you want to try any new stunt you'd better consult with me first."

"It's not a publicity stunt!" she denied indignantly. "I'm not going to give my name—just the address."

"And you'll have a crowd out there that'll make a mob of movie extras look tame," said Ted. "Can't you imagine what kind of a bunch an ad like that would bring?"

"I don't see why." Amy pouted the lovely cupid's bow that was the still-photographer's chief delight.

"My Gawd!" Dan exclaimed. "Amy LeClare, about whom half the movie public is mad, is so hard up for a man that she has to advertise!"

"I'm fed up with the professional bunch and the silver-screen johnnies. I want to meet a *real* man," she flared.

"Thanks!" chorused the four men sarcastically.

To the surprise and consternation of them all, Amy LeClare covered her face with her hands and burst into tears—not camera tears that roll gracefully down a beautifully unmoved countenance, but real stinging salt tears that oozed out of painfully squinted eyes to leave a ragged course through her make-up.

The four men adored Amy and would have jumped at the chance of filling that yearning heart, had she given them the slightest chance.

"You need a vacation, kid," said Ted, soothingly. "The studio and all of us guys have got on your nerves. It's not romance but a change you need. As soon as we shoot this last retake, off you go. A rest and change will fix you up."

TED was as good as his word. When the picture was finished, he sent Amy off for a vacation in the country. He said he knew of a farm where she could board and live simply and forget all about her professional world for a while.

Amy was met at the station by a man named Barney, with a bright new Ford. Imagine her surprise when she descended from the train and looked questioningly around, to be greeted by a tall, well-built chap in overalls.

The moment she saw his pleasant tanned face she had a feeling that she was going to like the country.

"Are you Miss Brown?" he asked in a deep, hearty voice.

She almost denied it, but remembered in time that she was "Miss Brown" while here in the country. She desired a complete change from her professional associations. Besides, she thought the farm folks would be more natural with her if they did not know she was a famous film star. She wanted to get the real atmosphere of the place.

"Yes, I'm Miss Brown," she acknowledged. "Are you Mr. Trimble?" For Mr. Trimble was to be her host.

"Naw, I'm not Trimble," he replied with a wide, friendly grin. "I'm Barney, one of the hired men."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Barney," said the girl, trying not to speak condescendingly. She extended her hand and let it be swallowed in his big, work-calloused paw.

Amy was glad that the drive out was not long, because she did not know what to say to Barney. What did one say to a hired man, she wondered?

He made a prosaic comment on the weather and then subsided into silence with perfect comfort—she could see that, while she herself felt uncomfortable and ill at ease without the prop of conversation.

It was silly to feel self-conscious—she, who was used to the best society and to celebrities and to titled folk—yet, here she sat beside this hired man, tongue-tied and increasingly aware of him.

SHE was welcomed to the farmhouse by Mrs. Trimble, a stout, amiable woman.

Supper was ready shortly after her arrival, and at the table she met the rest of the folks: Mr. Trimble, a gaunt weather-beaten farmer; their two little daughters, Lucy and Jane; also Charlie, the other hired man, who had a queer restless look about his lean face.

"Don't mind Charlie," Mrs. Trimble had warned her before he came in. "Charlie's queer. But it's been so hard to get help for the haying this year that we had to take him."

All sat at the table together in rustic fashion, with Mrs. Trimble jumping up now and then to get something. Once it was hot biscuits from the oven, again rich cream from the creamery.

Amy, her mouth watering at the delicious home cooking, knew it was going to be a struggle to keep her weight down to movie requirements.

At first she was rather disconcerted by farm manners. When Mr. Trimble or Charlie would rise with fork in hand to spear some food across the table, she did not know what to make of it.

The first time this happened it was Charlie after a tomato. The dish was right in front of her place and when she saw his armed hand descending, apparently right at her, she jumped involuntarily and almost screamed. Having speared his object, Charlie paused with it in mid-air to stare at her open-mouthed, as though he had just discovered her presence. Then he grinned a wide, rapid grin, and finally returned his attention to his plate.

If only his hair was not so closely cropped he would not look quite so terrifying, she thought, stealing a glance around to see if any one had noticed her confusion.

She was not sure, but she rather fancied there was an amused twinkle in Barney's eye. She liked him the best. He sometimes remembered his manners and asked to have things passed! She thought, too, that if he would keep himself shaved and get a city haircut, he would be decidedly good looking.

After supper Amy lay in the hammock swung between two trees near the house, and watched Barney play tag with the two children. He caught them easily, tossed them up in the air a few times, and then let them chase him.

Later, when she went into the house, she saw him sitting on the porch steps with a little girl on either knee telling them a story. She liked that, his way with the children.

THE next morning Mrs. Trimble sent her daughters to show Amy the farm—the cows, calves, pigs, hens, and the mare with a newborn colt. The movie actress got a huge

thrill from gathering some new laid eggs, still warm.

"Where is Bar—where are the men-folks?" she corrected herself hastily.

"They're haying, out in the fields," explained Lucy.

"Can we go and watch them?"

"It's purty far to walk," objected Jane. "But maybe daddy will let us go on the wagon with him this afternoon. Sometimes he does."

Mr. Trimble was quite willing to have company on the haying expedition. "Ye'll like riding back a-top the hay," he told Amy genially.

They jogged to the field in the empty wagon, with Barney grabbing Amy's elbow to steady her whenever they went over a bump. While the men pitched hay she sat in the shade of a tree with Lucy and Jane, chewing wintergreen leaves, which they assured her were good to eat.

All the time she had the feeling that she was acting in a picture, and expected at any moment to hear Ted's voice shout "Okay. Camera!" It did not seem as if anything so unusual to her experience could be real.

Wielding his pitchfork to toss huge hay-loads onto the wagon, Barney presented a picture of husky virility, in contrast to Charlie, who was skinny and bow-legged.

The ride home from work was fun, way up on top of the wagon load of hay, after a wild scramble to get there with Charlie pulling from above while Barney boosted from below. She found herself lying deep-sunk in the hay with Barney near by smiling lazily at her.

"It's such fun!" she exclaimed breathlessly, "don't you think so?"

"Well," he countered, "sometimes it's pretty hard work, 'specially when the sun is hot as blazes. But right now it's fun."

His eyes looking significantly into hers, left no doubt as to his complimentary intent. She found his glance strangely moving.

In fact, she was charmed with the whole of farm life. No cameras to pose for, no public to dress for—just to be her own free self!

How wonderful to be away from the artificiality of the studio, she thought as she knelt beside her open window that night, drawing deep breaths of the sweet country air and listening to the sharp call of the crickets.

She hopped into her feather bed, tittered gleefully as she sank way down with her own weight, and promptly fell asleep in perfect content.

Long, restful days followed in which Amy relaxed her over-stimulated nerves. She thought she loved rural life—but in reality she would soon have tired of it had it not been for Barney.

So natural was it for her to bring every man she met to kneel at her feet, that without actually meaning to, she was exercising her wiles on this handsome hired man. There was unconscious witchery even in the way she passed him food at dinner. And unless Barney's eyes lied flagrantly, he was responding to the lure of her.

He had asked her to walk up the road with him a few times and she had done so, but the conversation had been impersonal. It was only Barney's eyes that were personal—daringly personal!

When she caught an unveiled glance she would ask, "What did you say?" as if he had spoken. And he'd reply seriously, "I didn't say anything."

Then she would give a tinkling laugh and turn away lest he read mischief in her face.

But what she had not bargained for,

and certainly did not wish, was Charlie's growing attention. He stared at her persistently and at meal times she wondered how he could feed himself without watching what he was doing. It was embarrassing, even disturbing, for the look in his eyes was decidedly queer. So she kept out of his way as much as possible.

ONE evening after the children had been sent to bed, Amy seated herself on the porch railing to enjoy the lovely night air. Charlie sauntered up and stood over her with a weird grin.

"C'mon for a walk," he invited.

"Why I—it's—it's getting late," she stammered, giving the first excuse that came into her head. She did not care to go walking with Charlie at any time, much less in the dark of evening.

"Oh, c'mon!" he urged, sidling nearer.

"I'm going in, in just a minute—I'm tired," she said. "But thanks, anyway, Charlie."

"I don't see why you won't come with me," he pouted. "You go with Barney. I've seen you." Suddenly he reached out and grabbed her arm. "C'mon. You come with me, just as if I was Barney."

His expression was so sullen, yet insistent, that she was frightened. Besides, his grip on her arm was compelling. She tried to shake him off.

"Not to-night, Charlie," she said.

He thrust his head close to her face and squinted at her evilly.

"Not to-night," he mimicked. Then he jerked the girl to her feet. "If it isn't to-night it won't be no night," he shouted. "I know you. You and Barney have a plot to freeze me out."

"Don't be silly!"

Amy spoke as coolly as she could,

though she was beginning to tremble with fright.

At that moment Barney came dashing up from the barn, vaulted the porch railing, and stood beside her.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded. "Let go there, Charlie!"

"Not on your say so," Charlie defied him.

Without further argument Barney pried the fingers loose and wrenched his hand away, turning his wrist roughly.

"That hurts!" whined Charlie.

"All right. You see how you like it," Barney told him. "Now get out."

Charlie slunk off a couple of steps and halted.

"You want me to get out so you can stay with her," he flung over his shoulder.

Barney retorted: "I heard Miss Brown ask you to excuse her. You're too dumb to know when you're not wanted."

Amy went to sleep that night with pleasant thoughts of Barney as her champion. She was wondering what kind of a farmer's wife she would make, when she fell asleep.

THEY were all playing hide-and-seek one night, after dinner.

Amy was "it" and she had to hunt for the others. Her search led to the barn.

She stepped inside to peer around in the darkness. A shadow behind the door moved, so she called out:

"Who's there? Come on out. I spy!"

As there was no response she stepped over to find out who it was, and suddenly was drawn into an embrace.

"Barney!" she said softly, in a gently remonstrating tone but without trying to break away.

"Huh! Barney!" sneered Charlie's

voice, and his face came close to hers for a kiss.

"Oh!" she cried in horror, struggling to get away.

But she could not free her arms. It was all she could do to twist her head and avoid his lips. She kicked wildly, but was too close to do any damage.

"Barney!" she shrieked at the top of her voice, when she felt her strength waning.

There was such terror in that cry that it brought Barney flying.

"Amy? Where are you? What is it?" he called.

He rushed into the barn and turned his flash light into the dark corner. It illuminated the scene with startling clearness. At once he dropped the flash light into the hay and leaped on Charlie, dragging him away.

"Don't beat him up, Barney," said Amy.

"You—go—in—the—house. Go—to—bed," came the reply, a grunted word at a time.

As she felt faint from the distressing encounter, she obeyed. While she was getting ready for bed, and long into the night while she tried to get to sleep, she kept wondering if Barney had given Charlie a thorough beating. He deserved it. It was not pity that moved her—no, she was afraid he might take some mad revenge.

THOUGH she kept reminding herself that Barney was a hired man, she was growing fonder of him every day. She tried to tell herself it was just because of that furnished heart wanting a tenant and he was the only tenant in sight, but it was no use. His splendid virility and clean manhood won her entire admiration. She often wondered what Amy LeClare's public would think if they knew

she was becoming fond of a farm hand.

She was lying in the barn in the hay one afternoon and had to climb the ladder up to the first beam, because the hay was already piled that high. It was a favorite retreat of hers. She liked to take a book and read till she dozed off.

That afternoon she had been asleep and was awakened by the opening of the barn door.

"Barney!" she called softly, and ducked deep into the hay so that he could not see her.

"Ho, there! Amy!" he shouted back. "Where are you?"

"Here," she said, peeking over at him.

In a second he had scaled the ladder and dropped beside her.

"So this is your lair!" he said, and boldly took possession of both her hands.

She made a pretense of drawing away; there was a slight struggle, and she found herself lying on his arm, with his face bending over hers in poignant appeal.

"Kiss me," his lips whispered. "Kiss me, dear one!"

Without waiting for permission he put his lips to hers, crushing her to him.

Under the spell of the moment she responded ardently. When his lips touched hers she knew that she had been wanting to kiss him for a long time.

Amy LeClare, who had kissed dozens of men in her career—as a matter of business—was stirred as never before. There was a sweet strength in Barney's embrace that made her almost dizzy with joy.

She could not have drawn away had she wanted to. But she did not want

to—she forgot who she was, who Barney was—all she knew was the honey of his kisses, the pleasure of his arms so close about her.

The noise of a wagon driving up outside disturbed them, and they drew apart. Barney leaned back for one last quick kiss, then let himself over the side, dropping from the beam to the barn floor, just as Charlie came in.

"YOU'RE here, are you?" snarled Charlie, pulling the big doors shut. "Well, now I'll settle with you!" he yelled.

A wild, insane light came into his eyes. He snatched up a pitchfork lying near and dashed at Barney.

Barney climbed the first ladder, and then the second to the top beam, with Charlie after him.

He ran across the beam to the other side of the barn, thinking Charlie would not dare to follow. But Charlie was too crazed to be afraid of anything.

Amy shuddered as the two men ran around on beams not more than nine inches wide, far above the barn floor, in the dim light from a small window. A misstep, a wavering balance, and they would crash to the floor twenty-five feet below. Charlie, brandishing the pitchfork, seemed possessed of a demon.

Finally Barney, expecting to get away, made a flying leap into a bunch of hay on the barn floor below. Amy held her breath as his body whizzed through the air. She gave a gasp of relief as he bounced and regained his feet.

Then she shrieked wildly as she saw Charlie hurl the pitchfork down at him like a vicious harpoon. It missed him by a mere foot, and down came Charlie after it, shouting with baffled rage.

Before his opponent had landed in

the hay Barney was making for the barn door. He tried to open it with frantic jerks, but it stuck.

Charlie, having regained his weapon, came lunging after him. Barney sprang aside and swung himself up on the rope used to lift hay.

With demoniacal agility Charlie climbed up the almost perpendicular wall of hay, never relinquishing his hold on the pitchfork.

It seemed to Amy that she was taking part in a melodramatic photoplay. But an almost overwhelming fear swept over her at the hideous reality of it.

Barney dropped on the trap door into a manger hidden under scattered hay, and tumbled through, landing with a crash which Amy knew must have stunned him.

SHE sprang toward the ladder, her terror forgotten in her concern for Barney. Nothing must happen to him—his life suddenly seemed very precious to her—

But she must save him.

But Charlie was before her. He slid down the hay and dashed across the barn to the manger, where he had Barney at his mercy, penned in and helpless.

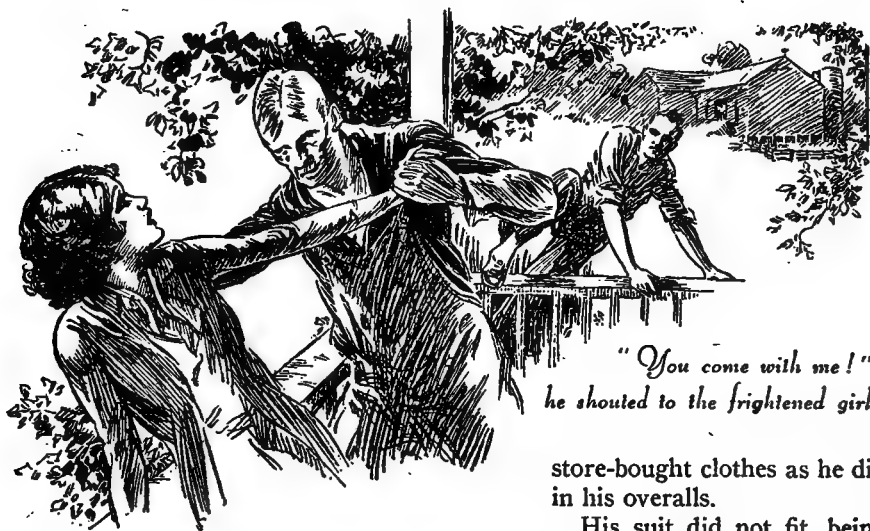
"Charlie, Charlie, don't!" she screamed, as he raised the pitchfork.

In the mood Charlie was in, she knew he would hesitate at nothing. Sick with horror, she grabbed the only object at hand, a milking pail.

She swung it aloft with the strength born of desperation, and brought it down on Charlie's head, just as his weapon was suspended over the dazed Barney!

The pitchfork crashed to the floor. Charlie crumpled up after it.

A moment later, with a hand to his



*"You come with me!"
he shouted to the frightened girl*

head, Barney came staggering out of the manger, just as the barn door was flung wide by Mr. Trimble.

"Oh, Mr. Trim—" Amy started, and burst into wild weeping.

Barney was none the worse for the adventure, and Amy's nerves calmed down after Charlie was dismissed. But when Barney tried to thank her for saving his life, he broke down and dropped his head into her lap—she was sitting on the porch steps with him seated on the step below her.

The impulse to crush his head to her breast was nearly irresistible. But she did resist it, and contented herself with running her fingers through the heavy brown locks which he always shook into disorder.

SATURDAY night Barney took her to town to see a movie show. This was supposed to be an event—Saturday night movies—and to Amy Le-Clare! But somehow Amy felt herself quite in the spirit of the thing.

She wished, however, that Barney had not dressed up for the occasion. He did not look nearly so well in his

store-bought clothes as he did in his overalls.

His suit did not fit, being too short in the trouser legs and sleeves, besides having a ridiculous countrified cut. And with the gaudy four-in-hand with which he had decorated himself, he was hopelessly rustic. It almost spoiled Amy's fun, for she was very sensitive to appearances.

But when Barney started driving with his left hand while his right stole along the seat behind her, she forgot his attire in an overpowering consciousness of the man himself.

It was as if she had received a telepathic message. "Be careful with this man. He can make you love him." But now Amy thought she wanted him to make her love him!

"Did you hear about the man who drove from here to Hollywood—and got five tickets on the way?" he asked.

"Oh, do they give tickets on the way?" she asked. "What for? Speeding?"

"No," he chuckled. "Parking."

Thereupon he turned into a little branch road and stopped the car. Amy's heart began to swell with expectation. She wanted him to kiss her, to say that he loved her—yes, she did!

But could she marry him—and live in the country all the time? And give up her career?

The man drew closer and sought her lips. At last her lips touched his, met a hot response, and clung.

Ah! Why *wouldn't* she be content on a farm as long as she would have Barney to kiss her? She gave herself up to the moment's bliss, throwing reason to the winds.

ONLY when he offered a stumbling proposal did she hesitate.

"I didn't mean to speak now," he cried in confusion. "It's not fair to you. But I couldn't help it. Amy, you are the most adorable girl in the world. I'm crazy with love for you. The minute I set eyes on you I knew how it would be. Will you marry me, sweetness?"

"May I give you my answer to-morrow?" she begged.

Now that it had actually happened, it did not seem so simple. To complicate her problem, Amy was under contract to do another picture, and they had all been so kind to her that she could not let them down. Whatever she decided about matrimony, the girl would first have to go back to do that picture.

"Amy," Barney was beseeching, "don't you love me? Not just a little bit?"

"Barney, darling, I do—I do," she confessed distractedly. "But there is so much to consider—you don't know how much. Please, I'll tell you to-morrow. Let's go on to the show now."

They were both so excited by what had occurred that neither of them noticed the announcement of the picture they were about to see. But as Amy settled herself in her seat and drew off

her hat, the thing that met her eyes was a close-up of Amy LeClare.

No use to think it might not be recognized—it was a speaking likeness, even literally, for she was saying "I love you!" to the screen hero. And she had not wanted Barney to know who she was until their personal problem had been decided!

She stole a look at him to see how he was taking it. He turned to meet her look with utter surprise in his eyes.

"That looks exactly like you," he murmured dazedly.

AS Amy watched the picture, a feeling of homesickness was born in her and grew through the reels until it was a poignant ache. How she would love to go back and see them all—Ted, Tracy, Dan, and even Jimmy! Acting was in her blood, it was a vital part of her; she could not gainsay that.

Barney's hand, stealing across to capture hers, interrupted these thoughts.

Barney! Adorable Barney!

But not of her life—she could see that he would never fit there. One look at Barney in his dress-up clothes was enough for that. But she loved him; she really did love him.

These conflicting thoughts tore her all through the picture, and during the drive home.

"Tired?" was the only comment Barney made on her silence.

But as they drew up in front of the house he said gently: "Why didn't you tell me that you were the famous Amy LeClare? I should have known it, but I didn't—not until I saw your beautiful face on the screen to-night. I see now why you need time to think about your answer to me. You must not judge hastily. I'm sure I could

make you happy, but that is for you to decide."

Then he caught her to him closely and rained kiss after kiss on her neck, her chin, her eyes, her Cupid's-bow mouth—until she drew away. She could stand no more. When Barney kissed her she thought her whole world was Barney.

SHE slept scarcely at all that night, Wild, contending thoughts distressed her. One moment she thought she could not live without Barney, and the next she knew she could not live in the country. It was not her life. She realized that now.

How she yearned for Ted's bellowed "Okay; camera."

She was of the city—of the studio—and nothing could change her. That professional atmosphere was vital to her existence. Her heart was not free; it was in her profession; it was a professional heart.

But Barney was vital to her, too! At the thought of giving him up she gripped the sheet in tense hands and unwittingly tore it halfway across. She wanted Barney. But the screen wanted *her*—it clutched at her with inescapable talons.

If she married Barney and lived in the country—she supposed he would get a farm of his own—she would be content for a while. Then those talons would begin reaching out for her.

She could defy them, but at what cost? Barney's happiness! No; it would not be fair to him. She could not make him happy if her heart was divided.

The idea came to her to coax Barney to the city. But that would not be fair, either. He would be as restless in the city as she would be in the country. The farm probably had him in its toils

as relentlessly as the profession had her.

So she decided to leave at once, on the morning train, although she knew it would break her heart to go away from the man she loved.

AFTER a hurried cup of coffee, which was all the breakfast she had appetite for, she started out to the barn where Barney was repairing harness. She had decided to tell him the truth—she owed him that.

He jumped with surprise when she appeared at the door.

"Early bird!" he exclaimed. "I'll be your worm."

"Barney," she said in a hardly controlled voice, for he was very dear to her, "I have come to say good-by."

He sprang to confront her.

"Amy! What do you mean? Your vacation isn't over yet."

"I've decided the least I can do for you is to go away at once."

"Then your answer is—*no*!"

A hurt look contracted his eyes—and sent an answering ache to her heart.

"My answer is—*no*," she repeated. The words were scarcely audible.

He tried to take her in his arms, but she stepped back.

"Don't—don't make it harder for me, Barney!" she pleaded, a hand outstretched to ward him off.

"Harder? Then it *is* hard. Why?" he demanded, and looked deep into her eyes as if to read her very soul. "Amy, you do love me?"

"Yes, Barney. I love you—enough—" Her voice caught, choked, and she had to swallow hard before she could finish. "Enough to leave you. I wouldn't be a success as a farmer's wife, Barney. It isn't in me. I'd only make you unhappy—"

"Oh, it doesn't matter about me," interrupted Barney huskily. "But if *you* wouldn't be happy—"

"Then you—understand, dear?" she asked eagerly.

"Almost. Only with me—*love* comes first."

There was a long silence. Amy felt that she had disappointed Barney even more than she had hurt him.

"Don't you love me, Barney?" she quavered.

"It would be better if he didn't," said her reason; but her heart was crying out to him jealously.

"Love you?"

Before she could avoid him, Barney had her in his arms, fairly smothering her against him. Then he forced her head back and pressed his lips on hers in a kiss that tore at the very roots of her heart.

At last he released her.

"Now do you know?" he challenged.

But she turned and fled as fast as her legs could carry her, and did not stop until she had flung herself, panting, on the bed in her room.

Mr. Trimble drove her to the station to get the train. All the way there she kept fighting the impulse to tell him to turn back. Again and again she had to remind herself, "You are an actress, not a farmer's wife; you couldn't make Barney happy. He deserves more understanding than you can give him."

She wept most of the time on the train, and arrived at the city with such a red nose and swollen eyes that she was glad no one was there to meet her.

"THE new picture," said Ted, after they had given her a wow of a welcome, "is a rustic one. It'll be right in your line now."

Amy gave a pathetic imitation of a smile. How could she do a farm picture, when it would be a constant reminder of Barney?

She had expected to be consoled for her loss as soon as she got in the studio. She thought that when she began to put on make-up the customary exhilaration would return and warm her cold heart.

But there was no exhilaration! The old charm was dead! All she felt was a gnawing ache of yearning for Barney.

Had she made a mistake? Perhaps she *could* have learned how to be a good farmer's wife, after all. Perhaps she had lost—

Then she thought of acting—of pretending to be in love—of being kissed for the camera, and a shudder shook her. She could not bear to have any one else kiss her—even in acting. Her lips were sacred to Barney.

She was on the point of running to Ted and telling him she could not go on, when she reminded herself that that would put him in a bad fix. The picture was written specially for her. And it was contracted for.

She decided she must go on with it, she must carry on for Ted. But as soon as it was done she would go back to Barney and offer herself to him. If she devoted herself to making him happy, to filling his every need, with the sincerest desire of her heart—she could not fail.

Strengthened and cheered by this decision, she completed her make-up and went onto the set. Ted was talking to some man who had his back to her. Her new leading man—the man who was to trespass with his kisses. A feeling of resentment and distaste seized her, and she was struggling with it when Ted called to her.

"Come on over, Amy, and meet Barnsdall Mayne, your new lead."

SHE forced her reluctant feet to bear her across the floor as Barnsdall Mayne turned around to face her. One look at his face halted her completely, and she stood transfixed, eyes blurring weakly.

"He's been working on a farm all summer," said Ted with a knowing grin, "to get the local color for this picture. You'd never think, to look at him, what a swell hired man he makes."

Still she stared, speechless, hardly daring to believe it.

"Do you think I can put it over—as a hired man?" the beloved voice asked.

"Barney!" she cried joyously.

It *was* Barney. Though he was dressed with the careless meticulousness of perfect taste, he was undoubtedly her "hired man." It was hard to remember him now as he looked the evening he took her to the movies.

His dear, handsome face was smiling broadly, and now he held out his arms to her. In a wild, impetuous rush she was in them.

He swept her clear off the floor in the hunger of his embrace.

"I was coming back to you, dear," she told him anxiously, "as soon as I fulfilled my contract. I have discovered that love is first!"

Still holding her to him, he replied soberly: "I want to apologize—it was not fair not to tell you—but I *couldn't* tell you then, somehow. You see, I knew I'd see you soon."

"But I didn't—and I suffered so," she reproached.

"But you found out that love is first," he reminded her. "Wasn't it worth it?"

"Yes—oh, yes. But, Barney, beloved, did you despise me when I left you?"

"No, sweetheart. I understood so perfectly. I couldn't live in the country, either."

At that, regardless of the onlookers, she reached up and gave him a quick kiss. Fired by it, he proceeded to kiss her passionately, exultantly—her brow, her eyes, her cheeks, her lips. And then again!

"Okay; camera," called Ted.

But neither of them heard—they were conscious only of each other.



The Secret

IT isn't berries, waxen white
And beautiful on Christmas night,
But that you love and tell me so,
That gives its charm to mistletoe!

—Rena S. Travois.

Flumpty=Dumpty Girl

*Cloe too sat on a wall and
Cloe too fell—in love*

By Betty Bennett



She landed in the arms of a boy—a boy with nice brown eyes who was very big

AS Cloe Martin bent over her history book, a little frown puckered her brow.

"A few weeks after the news of the Stamp Act reached the colonies, Patrick Henry offered a series of resolutions," Cloe read. From the Psi Delta frat house in the rear floated the strains of a waltz. "*My desert is waiting, dear, come there with me—*"

"Massachusetts again joined hands

with Virginia in upholding Colonial liberty—" "*Longing to teach you Love's melody, I'll sing a dream-song to you—*"

The frown burrowed deeper into Cloe's forehead. She was trying not to think of the Psi Delta dance. Her roommate Laura was going, even now was downstairs with her "date." But Cloe wasn't going.

A sound of footsteps and blond

Laura, in orchid tulle, came fluttering in.

"Almost forgot my evening coat," she commented, picking up and throwing about her a gorgeous turquoise wrap.

In spite of herself, Cloe gazed at her roommate enviously. So happy, so sure of herself! So different from her, Cloe. Laura was all feminine, grown-up, sought after by men. And Cloe, though eighteen, didn't have dates. She didn't really look old enough to be in college.

Her close-cropped, straight black hair and her stubby black lashes gave her a very young, little-boy air. Worse still, she was shy. Whenever a nice boy spoke to her, he upset her so that she said "good morning" in the afternoon and "good afternoon" in the morning. Or spilled her books and pencils all over the classroom, blushing in distress while the boy picked them up.

At last the door closed behind her roommate's silver slippers, and Cloe laid her head dejectedly on her history book.

"—blue heaven and you and I, sand kissing a moonlit sky—the desert-song calling, its voice enthralling will make you mine—"

The melody was so hauntingly lovely that it hurt, like a pain in her heart. She rose suddenly, switched off the study light, raised the shade. The fraternity house, a square colonial building surrounded by a vine-covered brick wall, was brilliantly illuminated. Laughter and snatches of talk floated up to her.

"If I could only see the dance even," she thought. The high wall shut off all view of the downstairs windows. "If I were on the wall I could! And why shouldn't I?" she argued. "No one would see me, and I'd do no harm."

Noiselessly she slipped down the stairs and into the yard. Aided by vines and loose bricks, she scrambled up the wall, drew herself over the top.

It was scarcely more than a foot and a half wide. Cloe, however, was little, and when she stretched out full length, cupping her face in her hands, she was quite comfortable.

Scrumptious! She could see everything. There was Laura and Tom!

"I'm Living in Paradise Now," the orchestra was playing. Some pep to that number! Followed "Reaching for You," "S'posin'," "Broadway Baby," and the older "Happy Days and Lonely Nights." Cloe knew them all. Laura was always singing dance music.

A couple came suddenly out of the back door—a tall man and a slim girl laughing up at him. In the pale moonlight, in her white chiffon gown, she was the personification of youth and romance and beauty. They sauntered slowly, murmuring together.

Suddenly the man drew the girl tight into his arms. To Cloe came faintly, "Tell me you love me, sweetheart!" And the girl's arms went about his neck, and she said sobbingly, "You know I do!" And they kissed, and then her head lay against his shoulder. She stood mute, with the world quiet about them and the moonlight falling like a benediction.

Cloe's eyes stung with unshed tears. How much those two cared for each other! Oh, it must be sweet to be loved!

A tide of loneliness swept over her. The couple, as swiftly as they had appeared, vanished into the fraternity house. She felt miserable, wistful, left out.

The music went on—gay, indifferent; the dancers glided blithely past

the windows. Cloe lay unstirring, lost in unhappy reverie. The music, the moonlight, the silence were like a drug to her senses. Perilously near the edge of the wall, she drifted into sleep.

SHE awakened with a sensation of falling, of grabbing frantically for support. She must have been asleep for some time, for the orchestra was playing the "Home, Sweet Home" waltz. She clutched at the vines. They ripped, sickeningly, and she went tumbling.

She landed in the arms of a boy, a very much surprised boy of perhaps twenty, who had nice brown eyes, soft brown hair, and who was very big.

He, however, was not so astounded as Cloe, who was gasping absurdly, "Oh, my gracious, my gracious!" She was like a little girl, big surprised eyes wide open under the stubby lashes.

"I was standing here, heard a shriek, and you came, apparently out of the sky," he explained. And then, his voice gentle, he asked, "You're not hurt?"

"Not in the least," she affirmed, detaching herself from him. "I—I was just on the wall—and—and fell off. I—I must have been asleep." She blushed.

He stared at her incredulously. "Asleep?"

"No—yes, well—I fell off anyway."

"You funny little girl!" he exclaimed, and his laugh was joyous. It made her want to laugh. "And you should have seen yourself when you landed in my arms. You looked—so surprised. Gee, you were cute!"

This time she did laugh, and his baritone echoed her merriment. The whole world seemed happy—vines nodding in the breeze, lights in the frat

house windows, the stars and the big moon above.

"How did you happen to be here?" she queried. Meeting the boy so unceremoniously, this friendly boy with the nice brown eyes, she forgot to be shy. And, at ease, Cloe was charming.

"Came in town too late for the dance, and found a letter—" He hesitated. "It was from a girl saying she wouldn't be at the football dance next week. I came out here to be alone. I guess I was hurt—or disappointed," he ended boyishly.

"I'm sorry," Cloe whispered with a sweet sympathy that was most appealing, though she was not aware of it.

"Then when you're with some handsome partner at the big dance," looking down into her sincere little face, "will you think of me deserted by my girl, glooming at home?"

She would have liked him to believe that she was popular like other girls, but she was innately honest. "I'm not going," she said, trying to sound as if it didn't matter.

"Not going?" he echoed in surprise. And then, "I wonder if I could get you to go with me? I'm Jack Prescott, one of the Psi Delta bunch. Gosh, I'd love to have you."

"And I'd love to go!" she answered swiftly, gave him a trembly little smile.

"WHERE in heaven's name have you been?" catechized Laura, when ten minutes later Cloe opened the door.

"Oh, I just met one of the Psi Deltas. He asked me to the big football dance," she announced as casually as she could.

"Really! Who is he?" from Laura excitedly. Anybody's dates were exciting to Laura.

"His name's Jack Prescott."

"Jack Prescott!" Laura gasped. "My heavens, do you realize he's the leading man in the junior play, a football player, president of the Psi Delta fraternity, and all the girls are crazy about him?"

"That so?" from Cloe, while her heart thumped. "What do I care about all that? He has nice brown eyes, soft, and he can be very gentle, and he makes me laugh!"

"YOU'LL never know how much I enjoyed to-night," Cloe said, her eyes, above the alluring little blue evening frock, gleaming like stars. The dance, after four never-to-be-forgotten hours, had come to an end, and she and Jack stood on the porch of Dato Inn. "Thank you so much for asking me." She gave him her warm little hand in good-night.

His closed about it. The night was soft and warm about them. A little pulse began to beat in her throat.

"Cloe," he questioned gravely, "could I kiss you?"

As she looked up at him—tall and manly and big—she didn't know what to say. She hadn't, like so many girls, given her kisses to men. Unless a man cared for her and she for him, she had thought she didn't want him to kiss her.

But she had never felt toward any one as she did toward Jack. It seemed as if she had known him months and months. He had said it was that way with him, too. And that he'd never known a girl whose high opinion he wanted as he did hers.

They stood staring at each other, he with pleading tenderness in his brown eyes, and she a little frightened, wondering.

And then, with a quick little intake

of breath, she uptilted her earnest little face. He caught her to him, and his lips pressed on hers. She could feel the thumping of his heart.

He let her go quickly, and she turned and ran into the house, trembling a little, hearing in her ears his words: "I love you, dear!"

It was hours before she could go to sleep, for she had to live over again all that had happened. She had to repeat all that Jack had said to her.

At meeting, "Dressed *just right!* And blue's my favorite color." Later, "I love to watch your eyes, Cloe. They're bright as stars!" And on the way home, "We'll have to have some really good times together, now that we've found each other. Rides in my roadster, dances, shows. Dates every week, won't we?" And last of all, the crowning joy, "I love you, dear!"

Oh, the magic of Love's first dreams! And the magic of those next two weeks during which time the girls in the house warned teasingly, "Watch out for him, has a hot line, I hear!" and Laura asked, a little enviously, "Tell me, Roomie, is he serious?"

"EVERYONE on the stage!" Miss Stewart ordered the junior cast.

The players scrambled up on the platform. All except the leading man who was seating Cloe Martin in the front row of the school theater. And then he hurried after the others.

Cloe sat eagerly waiting. She was a little thrilled to have been asked to drop in during rehearsal of "The Lotus Flower."

During the next half hour the players unfolded the story of Ah Muey, a Chinese girl of high caste, and her brave soldier lover, Ching Ju.

When Jack, as the hero, sang in his rich baritone during the second act,

"Oh, Little Oriental Princess," and for a moment gazed, not at Ah Muey, but at Cloe, her breath caught in her throat.

Her eyes followed his every move. 'At last she could contain her pride in him no longer. "Isn't he wonderful?" she whispered to Bill, his roommate, who had come in and seated himself beside her.

"A born actor," he corroborated and then, noting her bright eyes and flushed cheeks, "but say, you're not falling for him, are you? He's engaged to his girl Shirley back home, you know."

The world rocked before her, and it was all she could do to make answer.

The players went through the third act, but Cloe did not see or hear them.

At last the rehearsal was over, and she hurried to the door.

"Wait, Cloe! Cloe!" called Jack, running after her. "I'm going home with you."

He swung into step beside her, talking cheerfully. She answered, with a strained little smile on her face.

They reached Dato Inn. "May I come in?" he inquired expectantly.

She couldn't say "No." He would ask for explanations, and she couldn't explain. She would never let him guess that she had fallen for his "line." That she had been too dumb to know he hadn't meant anything in rushing her.

She seated herself by the window, and he sprawled out on the davenport.

"You're quiet to-day," he charged, looking intently at her. "Blue?"

She shook her head.

"That's good, for I'd hate to see you anything but happy, *ever*." After a moment, saying, "Cloe, you *are* blue!" he went over to her. He cupped her chin in his two hands, tilting her face backward, searching her eyes.

She lowered her lids, feeling the sting of tears. How terrible if she should burst out crying! "It's your imagination," she said faintly. She tried to draw her head away. But his hands under her chin held firm, and she realized that his face was nearing hers. "Don't!" she cried. "Don't kiss me!" And turned her lips away.

"Why, Cloe!" And then, "Don't you want me to—don't you like my kiss?" Bewilderment on his usually cheerful face.

"Please don't," she begged.

"I apologize," in a strange, tight voice. "I thought that you—you didn't mind." He stood looking down at her—big and manly and hurt.

Her heart was telling him pitifully, "It's only because I care so much! When a kiss means nothing to you and everything to me, I—I just can't let you kiss me!" But her lips, commanded to hide her heart, declared harshly, "Indeed, I do mind. Kindly *don't* do it again!"

He stared at her unbelievably. Then, "Evidently I'm not wanted here." And, in a hard voice, "Well, there are other places just as good!"

Without as much as saying goodbye, he left her. The door closed behind him with a little click of finality.

Cloe ran to the window, tears streaming down her cheeks. He strode rapidly down the street while her heart called and called: "Jack! Jack! Come back, oh, *come back!*"

It seemed to her that it would break.

THE theater was darkened and, except for coughing here and there, very still. Laura gave breathless attention to the picture. "Her Man," but Cloe did not see the screen at all. She had espied Jack, beside Bill, in the front row balcony.

She was wholly absorbed, watching him. Sometimes she caught the young curve of his cheek, twice his irregular boyish profile. Watching him from a distance was all that was left now of her bare little romance. That and passing him with a proudly polite, "Hello, Jack," when they passed on the street. She knew that, in the two weeks since their quarrel, she had made him believe that he meant nothing to her; but that somehow didn't seem to make her very happy. She wasn't happy at all tonight.

Her attention was suddenly caught by an odd creaking and groaning. What was it? She heard a splitting of wood, a tearing. And then every sane thought went out of her head. The balcony was giving way!

Jack and the front rows vanished sickeningly from sight, fell with a deafening crash. Men were yelling, women screaming. Though the back balcony held, under its separate construction, it was swaying perilously. In panic, people were rushing wildly for stairways. She was swept along with them now, pressed against, stepped on, stumbling on a stair, falling, suffocating.

When her eyes opened, she was outside. The building was roped off, policemen on guard. Ambulances stood at the curb. A man inquired, "All right? You fainted in the crush, you know." Her dazed brain cleared; she heard herself asking, "Where's Jack?"

Instantly she pressed into the crowd, searching everywhere. She caught sight of Bill, an arm hanging limp, arguing hotly with a policeman. She flew to him. "Where's Jack?"

Caught beneath a fallen pillar. Unconscious. Bill had tried to pull his friend out, but, with the injured arm, had had to come for help. Now this crazy guard, swearing every one was

out, was refusing entrance. A part of the upstairs was about to fall.

With a stifled cry, the girl darted toward the forbidden door, but the policeman was too swift for her. Angrily he caught her, swore into her deaf ears, persisting, "No one's inside!"

Sobbing, she turned from him. Jack in there, pinned beneath wreckage, perhaps dying! Her brain blazed red.

She had to save him. She *had* to!

There must be an entrance in the rear. Perhaps unguarded. She sped to the alley, flung open the stage door. After darting through a narrow hall, she reached the stage, ran down some steps.

In the eerie half-darkness of the big theater, red exit lights glared at her like evil eyes. There was something sinister in the very air. Her heart throbbed in her throat. In this dark place, among the debris, would she be able to find Jack? Find him—in time?

She reasoned out where he should have fallen, and went forward, calling his name. Amazingly he was there. Lying helpless, like a corpse. She gave a little choking cry. He was pinioned beneath a fallen pillar. Blood oozed from a wound on his forehead.

She dared not waste time. She seized the plank that imprisoned him. And let go her hold almost at once. Again had come that ominous tearing and splintering. She crouched close to Jack.

THE crash made her eyes close. Opening them, she perceived that the lights had gone out. A weird flickering seemed to come from nowhere. And then indeed did her heart plunge with horror. Fire was following in the wake of the crash! Already great flames leaped into life near an exit, feeding greedily on rotted wood.

A moment of paralyzing fear, and then she tore again at the pillar. She threw all of herself into her task. Her heart began to pound with the strain; her breath grew heavy and labored. She was wet with sweat. Aching muscles cried out their protest. Smoke made her eyes smart. Pain poured from slim hands and settled in her back. But she kept grittily on. She had to move the timber. She—had—to—move—the—timber. She tugged and strained and agonized.

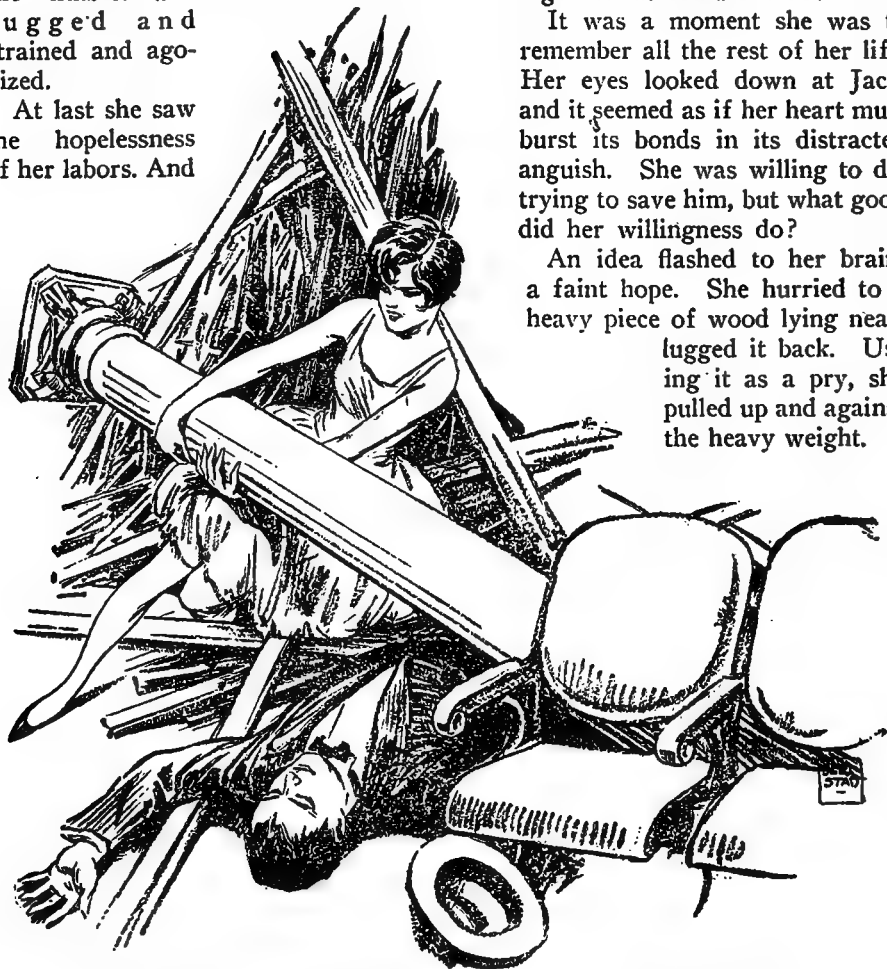
At last she saw the hopelessness of her labors. And

that the fire was growing with dangerous swiftness. Flying sparks had already set new ones. Ten minutes and the place would be a blazing furnace.

Perhaps the fire department would arrive soon—surely a call had been sent in—but supposing they did, would there be time to free Jack? If she went out for aid, would she receive it or again would no one be allowed within? Oh, how fast the fire was spreading! What could she do?

It was a moment she was to remember all the rest of her life. Her eyes looked down at Jack, and it seemed as if her heart must burst its bonds in its distracted anguish. She was willing to die trying to save him, but what good did her willingness do?

An idea flashed to her brain, a faint hope. She hurried to a heavy piece of wood lying near, lugged it back. Using it as a pry, she pulled up and against the heavy weight.



With an effort that wrenched a sob of pure agony from her lips, she tried once more to lift the weight

With an effort that took every atom of muscle and will, that wrenched a sob of pure agony from her lips, she made a last stand. The weight slipped off! Tears of gratitude ran down her cheeks.

But she had fought only part of the battle, she soon saw. Exits obstructed by debris and fire left as the safest one that by which she had come. Already flame-bordered, it was becoming every minute less passable. She almost sobbed because she was not strong enough to lift Jack and dash swiftly through to safety. She had to drag him, to move him at all, and it was slow and hard going through the wreck-filled aisles.

So awful the smoke now. Pouring everywhere, evil, dirty-gray. She struggled on, confidence gone, crying, choking, breathing in short, sucking gasps, sometimes dropping to the floor. The heat at the foot of the stage, like the blast from a hundred furnaces, sent her reeling back.

"Go on! Go on!" her will lashed out.

She pressed forward, sobbing because her body had to endure the punishment. Face convulsed. She seemed to be some stricken spirit trapped in hell, seeking escape from its fires. Struggling in vain. Doomed to perish in the flames.

The smoke—the heat—the terror. Was she never to get out? The sleeve of her dress had caught fire! The heat—the awful heat. She *was* in hell. Half crazy now. Oh, to get out of this!

She fumbled at the outside door. "Help!" half sob, half scream.

A WHITE-HAIRED doctor held a liquid to Jack's lips. The boy's eyelids fluttered.

Her heart leaped.

"Nothing worse than a badly in-

jured knee," the old man told her. "I'll fix up your burns in a minute."

"Don't let Jack see you here!" her pride dictated. "He might suspect you cared."

"Oh, I'm all right!" she informed the doctor swiftly. When he bent again over his patient, she slipped away.

She let her friends believe that the bandaged arm, which she had had treated in a drug store, was the outcome of the panic. And in the morning she had nothing to say over a certain sensational newspaper story that was headed

"MYSTERIOUS CO-ED HEROINE"

It was a vivid account of how Jack Prescott had been rescued, at risk of her life, by an unknown co-ed. Though burned, she had declared, "Oh, I'm all right!" and vanished. The doctor alone had seen her. "A girl whose heroism would delight the gods!" he had declared. The story closed with a request that she make herself known to be properly thanked.

Cloe cut out the account, hid it in the bottom of her trunk. It was to be put away from other's eyes, just as had been her hopeless adoration of Jack with his nice brown eyes and his "hot line."

AND now a new chapter began for Cloe. One day a boy in history class, attracted by the personality that went with the little-boy air and the turned-up nose, asked her to a Saturday night dance. There she met a football star who dated her for the following week. Laura, pleased if surprised to find Cloe going about, managed a blind date with a friend of Tom's.

Before long Cloe knew the glamour of flowers and telephone calls and

ardent eyes. One day Laura said, "That Pinkerton twin is crazy about you, isn't he?" She answered with quick disdain, "He's not serious!" But to have Laura think that he might be sent a little thrill through her. It was nice to be liked. There were other men besides Jack Prescott in the world, she told herself. How silly had been her childish crush on him!

After the fire she had not seen him for nearly two weeks. The white-haired doctor often passed, evidently on visits to him, and Cloe, lest she be recognized, was careful to keep out of sight. Now Jack was going about, with the exception of a slight limp, as healthy-looking as ever.

They frequently attended the same week-end dances. He was always with a beautiful red headed co-ed. Cloe had never seen any one who was so lovely or wore such pretty clothes. Her name, Cloe learned, was Chantilly Lee, and she belonged to the oldest sorority in school. Her father lived in Minneapolis, had a summer home, boats and horses.

She wondered if he had fallen for the girl seriously—she couldn't blame any man for that, Chantilly Lee was so attractive—and would give up Shirley. But of course it didn't matter to her. Let him marry either one—both if he wanted to!—he meant nothing in her young life.

She believed that until one evening in April. The evening the Pinkerton twin told her that he cared. He was hurt, unhappy, to learn that she merely liked him, but he was not so unhappy as she. She went home and cried all through the night.

It was because, facing the truth, she saw that for months she had only been kidding herself. Jack did matter to her, more than anything. She didn't

want any one but Jack ever to call her dear or put his hand in hers or draw her head against his shoulder. So far as she was concerned, there were no other men. For a week after she made the discovery, nights she buried her head in her pillow lest Laura hear her sobs, and cried and cried.

One afternoon, about a week after Tommy Pinkerton's proposal, Jack nearly ran over her with his roadster. She was crossing the street and didn't see a car approaching. With a loud screeching of brakes, he stopped less than a foot from her.

"Good heavens, Cloe!" he exclaimed whitely.

With hot cheeks, she looked up at him in his bright blue collegiate sweater.

"Don't you ever watch where you're going?"

"I—I didn't see you."

"Evidently not," ungraciously.

"Well, hop in and I'll take you home."

And, ah, how cruelly casual were their words as they sped along!

The car glided to a stop before Dato Inn. She was thinking, "Jack, honest, I don't see how any one could help but love you!" But her voice, all tied up in a knot inside, said stiffly, "Thank you for the ride."

And he answered, "Oh, that's all right."

HE did not offer to open the door, help her out. Embarrassed, she made a little movement of departure.

"Any other girl would stay and talk a moment or invite one in," he observed.

Hot color flooded her cheeks. "I—I thought—" lifting her gaze to his.

"That now I'd got you home, you'd

get away as soon as possible," his brown eyes meeting hers coldly.

"Why, Jack! You know that's not true!" she protested miserably.

"After I've seen you deliberately avoid me, you still talk like that?"

"I haven't avoided you," she denied, then crimsoned. It was so. Twice she had gone out of her way—because it hurt so to meet him!

"You have avoided me," he accused grimly. Then lightly, "I suppose it's because you took me for a mud puddle!"

"Jack, don't!"

Before she could say more, he was beside the roadster, opening the door. "I have to go," coldly dismissing her. "I'm late for the doctor who's due today for a last inspection." His face hard, unfriendly, and still—so dear!

"Don't, Jack dearest, don't be angry with me. Please, please! I like you so much, I just can't endure to have you like that!" her heart begged. But she didn't dare say a word lest she burst out crying.

She stumbled out of the car, brushing against an elderly man.

"Wait a moment!" a pleasant voice commanded. "Aren't you the mysterious co-ed?"

Her unhappy eyes looked up into those of the white-haired doctor.

"I thought one of us would discover Jack's rescuer!" he offered, smiling down at her. "And I see that he has."

"My rescuer?" Jack, joining them, echoed the words.

"Yes, from the fire. What! She never told you?"

"You mean *she* brought me out of that hell?" in a stupefied voice. "Cloe, is this *true*?"

"Yes," she answered low, her face all scarlet.

"I'm in no hurry," the doctor de-

clared. "Why don't you run into the house with her, Jack? It's about *time* you thanked her, you know."

A moment later the two stood in the living room of Dato Inn. The little figure in gray was at the window, staring hard at the elm tree without. Jack, big and tall, was just behind her, speaking.

"Cloe Martin, why in the name of heaven didn't you let me know? Why?"

"What does it matter?" she replied wearily, opening her eyes wide—for the wider eyes are open, the more tears they can hold without spilling. Oh, to have this moment over! World all awry, why go on living? Utterly blue, her mood now.

But this was a new Jack she was confronting. "Never mind what it matters," he commanded sternly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Not knowing what to say, she was silent. She couldn't tell him the truth. "Because I love you." And he wouldn't take evasion.

"Answer me, Cloe!" His voice was very firm.

She was racked with the torture of the moment.

SWIFTLY he took hold of her, hands firmly on her shoulders—she thought for a moment that he was going to shake her. "You've got to tell me why you didn't let me know about the fire. And you might just as well tell me now, for *I won't leave until you do.*"

Still no response from the statuelike little figure.

His voice suddenly gentle, pleading, "Cloe, why don't you like me?"

It went to her heart, sweeping away its barriers. "I—I do like you. I like you *too much*," she cried piteously.

"Too much?" in his questioning, grave voice. "Because you liked me too much—you—you treated me so—rotten. It doesn't make sense, Cloe."

"I didn't mean to treat you rotten," faintly, two tears escaping from the blue eyes.

"I don't understand—"

"I fell in love with you. I was afraid you'd find out!" brokenly.

"Oh, Humpty-dumpty," on a quivering, choking breath. The next instant he drew her into his arms, held her close, without a word.

She was crying, quivering like a child, her hot wet face pressed against his breast. She could scarcely breathe. Happy to have his arms again about her, to find he still liked her; miserable because he knew her love now and because there were Shirley and Chantilly Lee and his kiss meant nothing.

He was questioning again, "But, Cloe, that afternoon after rehearsal—"

"It was Shirley. Bill said you were engaged and—and I didn't think you should kiss me—if you were," she ended bravely. "Even if I love you—I—I wouldn't want you to!"

He held the sobbing little figure to his heart. "Oh, you sweet, sweet little girl. Didn't you ever guess how I felt? That I tried to keep away from you, not let you know how you'd hurt me? Like to-day, trying to be indifferent, yet not able to! Didn't you ever suspect that I loved you, dear?"

Was she hearing right?

"Even that first evening I met you, I thought, as I told my roommate Bill, 'Cloe Martin's the nicest girl on the campus.' And I was so tickled that you'd go to the football dance with

me! And when you let me kiss you afterward, I was too happy to think of sleep. I walked along Mendota for hours. That's how I cared even then. Shirley never meant to me what you do. Besides, she broke the engagement and dance date at the same time. I hadn't told Bill.

"My pride was hurt when I had the letter, I'll admit," he went on. "There was another man. But after meeting you with your cute little ways and your sweetness, I thanked my lucky stars I was free. I've been going about with Chantilly Lee—you may have seen me with her once or twice. (Once or twice!) She's nice enough but, gosh, darling, every time I went out with her, I wanted you. You're so genuine, Cloe, and cute and sweet.

"Ever since you humpty-dumptyed into my arms the night I met you, honey, I've wanted you there. Do you think enough of me," he asked a little unsteadily, "to marry me, Humpty-dumpty?"

She couldn't answer. She just clung to him. Words never came when she most wanted them. But for once Jack understood.

OUTSIDE a doctor paced, but he was not impatient. It had warmed his old heart—the sight of that fine Jack Prescott lad looking with all his heart in his eyes at the girl. And to think of the gritty little thing never letting him know what she'd done for him! Crazy about each other, plain as day. People could talk about the terrible unfeeling younger generation but he could tell them a thing or two!



"Ted!" she gasped. "I've
got to see Ted at once!"



Mad Marriage

*Out of the net of disillusion which her own mad
act had woven about her Sybil escapes
at last to find love's reality*

By Marthe Neville

SWEPT into a hasty marriage after an overnight acquaintance, Sybil Copely learns that the man she has married was engaged to Louise, her best friend, whom she has unknowingly betrayed by her impetuous action. Sybil's whole world seems to crash suddenly.

The disillusionment causes her to turn from her groom of a few hours and refuse to be his wife.

For appearances' sake, however, she consents to accompany Louise, her brother Rod and their party on the Caribbean yachting trip already planned. Her infatuation has passed and she learns that she has never had any real feeling for Ted Sherry, her husband. Accordingly the trip is a very unhappy one, with Sybil and Ted frozenly polite to each other, Sybil rooming with Louise, who is bravely trying to con-

ceal her breaking heart from offered sympathy.

Then—a tropical hurricane blows up and Sybil is swept overboard. Rod, the only witness, jumps into the sea after her, supporting her while the yacht vanishes in the distance!

Hours afterward, they reach an island and sink exhausted upon the beach.

They build a little bamboo hut, while Sybil occupies at night while Rod sleeps outside by the camp fire.

There on that tropical isle a great love springs up between them, but, for reasons of honor, each conceals that love. Sybil does not know that Rod adores her, nor is the boy aware that he is enshrined forever in her heart.

Rod discovers they are not alone. A battered schooner is moored on the other side of a high rock wall that virtually cuts the island in half. Its crew of white men is engaged in smuggling Chinese into the United States.

He obtains food supplies from the captain, Red Peterman, who obstinately refuses to take Rod and his companion back to civilization. Learning that the companion is a girl, four men invade the hut, knock Rod unconscious and seize Sybil.

Meanwhile Rod's yacht, the *Diana*, bearing Louise, Ted, and other members of their party, has been disabled by the storm and is abandoned in the Caribbean, while passengers and crew are rescued by a freighter, the *Manacuso*.

CHAPTER XV.

THE *Manacuso* was a sturdy, gray-bodied freighter, carrying a huge cargo of coffee from Santos, wool from the Argentine, and fruit from the West Indies.

She had accommodations for twelve passengers, and half of those were already occupied, but after valuables had been salvaged from the ill-fated *Diana*, the captain made arrangements for her passengers.

Louise, Betty and Wendy were installed in the captain's stateroom, while Ted, Jim, and Peter Pan shared a small, less attractive tourist cabin, and the crew were bunked as comfortably as possible.

Wendy wailed at being separated from her husband, but at Betty's irritated: "Oh, for Pete's sake, you ought to be glad you're alive," she smiled radiantly through her tears and called herself a little beast.

"You haven't lost a thing," Betty went on; "not a rag or a dollar, and yet you yip. Look at Louise. The yacht is gone—and poor Rod—"

Louise's face grew a trifle whiter, but she did not speak. Betty bit her lip in vexation at her own tactless remark.

After Louise had hung up her garments and then left the cabin, Betty said abruptly:

"I'm some nitwit. Poor kid, she's pretty brave, but she's broken hearted."

"You really think Rod and Sybil were drowned?" Wendy asked, her round eyes wide and sympathetic.

"I know it. They couldn't have lived an hour in that sea, and God knows how long they'd been in it before we discovered they'd gone overboard."

"They had on life belts."

"What of that? If Captain MacDuffy wouldn't lower the lifeboats to hunt for them, it's a dead certainty he knew they were drowned."

"Then," said Wendy slowly, resting her little round chin in a rosy palm, "Ted is a widower and can—"

"Can what?" Betty looked at her suspiciously.

WENDY'S cheeks flamed.

"You know Louise loves him, and I'm just sure he loves her. Oh, they've pretended their engagement meant nothing, and that the story he told about just meeting Sybil on the train was only a joke. But I know better."

"All of which leads up to what?"

"That there's no reason on earth why they shouldn't—shouldn't—well, they *were* going to get married—weren't they?—and if Sybil is dead—"

"Why, you wretched little pagan!" Betty gasped. "Are you serious? So soon after—honestly, Wendy, you horrify me."

"Do I? I don't care. Louise is the sweetest girl in the world, and I want to see her happy."

"You've a funny idea of making her happy, then. To want to turn her over to a man who jilted her, who has been half spiffed since, and—"

"That's because he was so miserable. He realized his mistake, and was so unhappy he just had to drink."

Betty rose indignantly and smoothed down her skirt.

"Just take my advice, Baby, don't say anything like this to Louise if you want to keep her friendship."

Louise barely spoke to the two girls who shared the cabin with her. She answered their remarks with a wan smile, dressed, undressed, and kept up the same routine of living as she had always done, but she slept little, and often refused to eat.

She had sent a radio to Miami the moment she set foot on the *Manacuso*. For two days she waited with breathless hope for a reply from her lawyer, telling her that Rod had been rescued,

and had also radioed him in the same fashion about her.

But when an answer did come, saying that no news had been heard of her brother, the hope flickered and almost died.

Ted and Louise found themselves alone a great deal of the time.

The two had not much to speak of. There were long, pregnant silences that drew them nearer to each other than words would have done.

Louise felt no embarrassment because she had confessed she still loved him—that love was so much a part of her it did not seem anything to be ashamed of—but she would have been embarrassed had he ever mentioned it again.

And the freighter plowed steadily northward, leaving the soft winds and calm sea behind, into the chill of winter, day by day drawing nearer their destination.

CHAPTER XVI

THREE weeks from the day she had picked up the refugees of the *Diana*, the *Manacuso* steamed into Hoboken. There were newspaper reporters to greet the freighter carrying the survivors, for the radio had informed the world of the yacht's disaster; and a group of bystanders was waiting to welcome them.

Among them was a fragile, white-haired lady, clad in soft gray velvet and chinchilla fur. A lovely old lady with rose-petal skin, wistful brown eyes now filmed with tears, and a quivering, childlike mouth. Ted Sherry's mother.

As the vessel moved slowly into port, its great hulk drawn forward by the small pilot boat, Ted and Louise

stood on the deck, arm in arm, and scanned the dock for two familiar faces.

All those twenty-one days a hope had lived that, by some miracle, Rod and Sybil had been rescued and would be in New York when they arrived. That hope, which had lived in spite of no message, died.

ABOARD the *Manacuso* Ted had had many hours of introspection, time to analyze himself and his emotions, to wonder at the mad passion that had caused such disaster.

There were moments when Sybil seemed very near him; that he could feel the allure of her presence, smell the fragrance of her hair; hear her voice. But always her stinging repudiation of him, her abhorrence of what he had done, lingered to destroy pleasant memories.

There were times also when it was impossible to recall her features, when she was little more than a dream, a brief interlude in his waking life.

Slowly but surely he realized that what he had believed was a deep, abiding love had only been a wild infatuation; that in giving rein to his passion he had destroyed the thing he really desired.

As he looked back he felt a horror of what he had done to Louise and to Rod. He couldn't have been quite himself, even if he had loved Sybil, to have deliberately jilted one girl, and married another on the way to accept hospitality of the one he had discarded.

He must have been insane. Sybil was unquestionably beautiful, but he knew, now that she was gone, he had truly loved not *her*, but the girl he had pushed aside for her.

Knowing Louise still cared, her frank admission that she did, did not

help his position any. His lips were sealed. He could not offer a love to her, the very mention of which was now an insult. His only chance of rehabilitation in her eyes was to remain true to his affection for Sybil. And that affection was dead!

It was not until Ted saw his mother at the dock that he remembered, with a rush of shame, that the old lady had never been informed of his marriage. It had taken place and ended so suddenly he had never written her.

She knew and loved Louise. When they had separated at the Pennsylvania Station he had told her he hoped Louise would return with him as his wife.

She would look upon Louise as his fiancée now. Her ideals of honor and chivalry would be crushed if she learned her son had acted the part of a cad.

He looked at Louise, standing beside him. The light of half hope had vanished from her eyes. Her face was gray with disappointment.

Could he ask her at this time to take part in a deception to save another?

SHE glanced up at him and smiled wanly. "I see your mother, Ted—but I guess—"

There was no need for her to finish the sentence. He knew what she would have said.

"Poor dear!" Ted waved his hand at the old lady, who was frankly weeping. "I can imagine what the suspense has been to her. My accident was a shock to her, and then this—"

"Ted, does she know of—your marriage?"

He shook his head, wondering if she had read his thoughts.

"Is there any need for her to know, then? If Sybil is dead—why harrow

her—about something she cannot help—and she may never hear of? You could hide your grief from her, couldn't you?"

"Yes."

Intuition had informed her of his desire. God! What a woman! Would she never cease heaping coals of fire on his head?

"Later," she continued huskily, "you can tell her we discovered our mistake in time and decided not to marry."

Ted acquiesced silently.

There were shouts and greetings from those gathered outside the gate, kisses and tears as the passengers left the gangplank to join friends and relatives.

Louise followed Ted and stood slightly aloof as he folded his mother in his arms and held her close to him for several minutes, unashamed of his tears that mingled with hers.

Louise felt shy, uncertain whether those faded loving eyes would be able to probe her secret.

There was a choking lump in her throat, a tight constriction around her heart. Every one had some one dear to welcome him or her. Louise alone stood without friends or relatives. Rod had been all she had left, and he was gone.

"You're coming with us, dear," the old lady said, kissing her. "Ted has told me about your bereavement, and I'm inexpressibly sorry. It's out of the question for you to go back to Florida now. The big house with so many memories of your dear brother would harrow you and add to your grief. With us the wound would heal quicker."

Louise's eyes found Ted's. There was a plea in his. She had not counted on staying in New York. Certainly

not upon being a guest of Ted's mother.

Under the circumstances it was only natural Mrs. Sherry would invite her, since she thought the girl her son's fiancée, but Louise rebelled at being forced to play a part at such a time.

"I intended to go to a hotel," she stammered, "and I feel that I should go back to Miami as soon as possible. There is still a little hope—if Rod is alive he would try to reach me there. If not, there is the estate to look after."

"That can wait," Mrs. Sherry said with a firmness that brooked no denial, and so it was settled.

LATER, when mother and son were alone, the mother said:

"Louise looks very bad. We must be kind to her or she'll have a nervous breakdown. Rod's death leaves her without any relatives at all, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Teddie, have—have you thought of marrying her now—when she needs you most—?"

He turned sick, startled eyes toward her.

"I know it isn't quite the conventional thing to do," she hurried on, "but you *are* going to marry her—I had an idea you would do so before this cruise was over—I can't see any sense in postponing it just because Mrs. Grundy says two persons who love each other must wait a year after a death—"

"I don't think Louise would want it," he interrupted thickly.

"Then make her want it. This is no time for her to be isolated, to face heartbreak and loneliness. If you love her, you should be by her side to comfort her, help carry her burdens."

"I do love her, God knows I do!"

His face had crimsoned, and his hands gripped spasmodically. "But I can't—think of marriage now."

"Fiddlesticks! Of course you can. Now, listen Ted—"

"Mother," he broke in hoarsely, "please—"

"If you're too conventional—too fearful of hurting her by speaking of marriage now, I'll do it."

Her slim shoulders braced with determination. She did not see the torment etched on his face.

"No! No!"

"Yes. Yes!" she laughed. "I thought you young men of to-day were modernly aggressive, but I'll swear we old-fashioned folks are more up and going than you."

He heard the door close after her, then he dropped into the divan before the fire, and burying his face in his hands, groaned aloud.

Louise would tell her the truth. It was too much to expect that she wouldn't.

IT was not until a week afterward, however, that Mrs. Sherry broached the subject to Louise, and then so tactfully, in such a veiled manner that at first the girl did not understand. When she did her face became scarlet.

"You mean Ted—*wants* to marry me now?" she asked with trembling lips.

"Yes, dear. He hesitated to speak about it—so soon—but he loves you very much—is so very unhappy over your sorrow, and wants to care for you at this time. I—offered to speak for him."

Mrs. Sherry took one of the girl's icy hands in hers, and pressed it tenderly.

Louise's brown eyes had widened in

bewilderment. What had she heard? Ted wanted to *marry her*. So soon after Sybil's death! Her ears must be playing her tricks. She had loved him so long, forgiven so much that she must be losing her mind.

"You—say he loves me?" her white lips quivered. The words were a mere breathless whisper.

"Yes, dear, you know he loves you."

"No. No, I don't know it." She gave a little strangled cry. "No! He doesn't love me. He can't!"

She pushed the other's hand away and drew back, trembling violently.

"But he does. More than anything in the world. You are all upset—overwrought by what has occurred, or you would know he does," crooned the old lady.

"But you don't understand. It's impossible—I—Ted and I—oh—" Louise flung out her arms with a hopeless gesture. "Please go away! Please leave me alone."

"My poor child. My poor little girl." Mrs. Sherry touched the vivid shining hair. "I'll send Ted to you, he'll make you understand better than I can."

She stole out of the room, completely bewildered over the changing attitude of modern young people.

"Go to Louise," was all she said to her son. "She wants to see you."

TED obeyed. He was prepared for Louise to denounce him in outraged anger—prepared for anything but the pitiful white-faced little figure huddled in the deep armchair, her fragile hands gripped tight together, her dark eyes blind with tears.

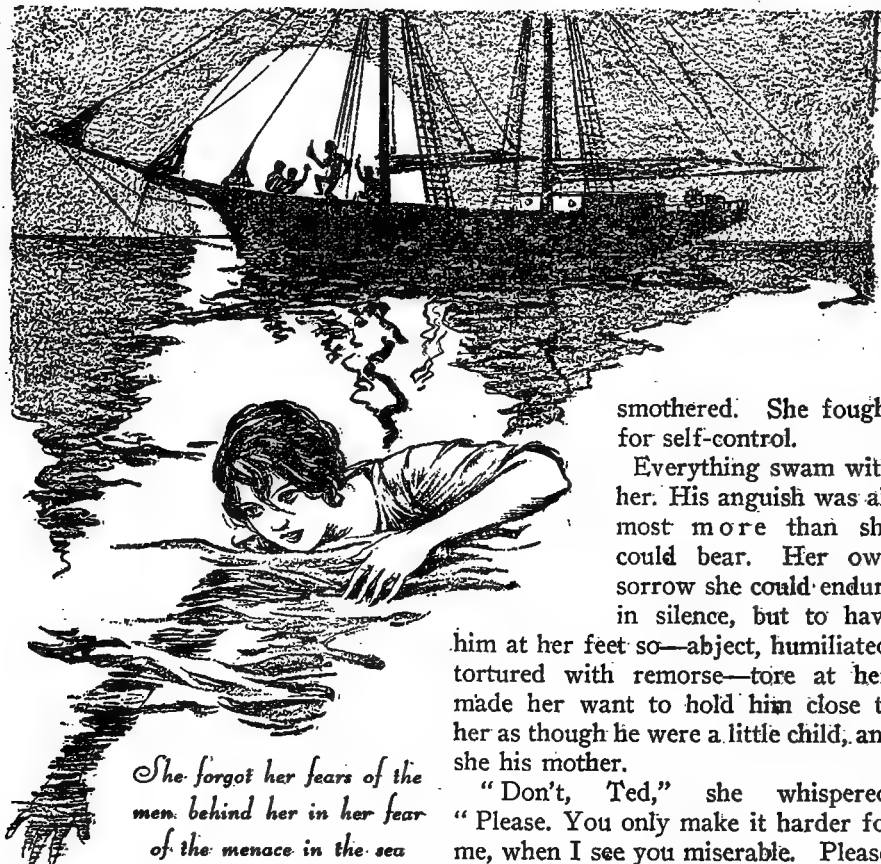
Nothing she could have said would have hurt half so much as the expression upon her face, or the attempt at a smile with which she greeted him.

"Your mother doesn't understand," she said softly. "I couldn't explain. Please forgive me. I'm afraid I was rude to her."

"Oh, my God!" he groaned.

honey-colored hair, and softly caressed his moist cheeks.

Her heart felt as though it were bursting. It beat against the folds of her gown so violently she was dizzy,



She forgot her fears of the men behind her in her fear of the menace in the sea

The next moment he was on his knees beside her, his head in her lap, while his arms closed about her.

"Forgive you! You! Am I to go on hurting you all my life? Forgive you, when if you cursed me from the housetops you would be justified. Louise, are you never going to stop being kind? Louise!"

Her fingers touched his face lightly, smoothed the glinting waves of his

smothered. She fought for self-control.

Everything swam with her. His anguish was almost more than she could bear. Her own sorrow she could endure in silence, but to have

him at her feet so—abject, humiliated, tortured with remorse—tore at her, made her want to hold him close to her as though he were a little child, and she his mother.

"Don't, Ted," she whispered. "Please. You only make it harder for me, when I see you miserable. Please. I didn't mind her coming to me—really I didn't—I was just startled, that's all."

"I love you," he cried in anguish. "I love you. I was crazy—as God is my judge—I wasn't responsible when I married Sybil—I couldn't have been—for I love you now more than I ever did." He seized her caressing hand and crushed it against his mouth. "I love you, and I'm not fit to touch you."

Her head sank against the back of

the chair. She closed her eyes with the rush of happiness that obscured everything around her. There was a roaring in her ears, a vast repetition of the words, "I love you."

"You loved me once, Louise—is it too late now for us to find happiness? If you have forgiven me and don't despise me, can't you take me back in your heart?"

"You're there now," she sobbed. "Oh, Ted, I've always loved you—*always!*"

"You make me so happy!"

His lips found hers, held them in a kiss that was nearly heaven, because they had both been so close to utter darkness.

It was strange they could think of marriage at this time—and yet not so strange. Sybil seemed but an incident, some one who had merely paused in passing—not of vital importance in their lives. She was regretted but, for the moment, forgotten.

They needed each other, hungered for each other, and reached eagerly for the happiness that was so near.

Louise promised to marry him quietly in his home within a month.

And Mrs. Sherry, tearfully happy, fancied she had played Cupid successfully.

CHAPTER XVII

SYBIL was still unconscious when the rowboat with the four men rounded the corner of the island and beached on the sand beyond the rocks. She did not hear the conversation that took place between Red Peterman and Bud Kellers.

"Did you kill him?" the skipper asked.

"Dunno, but if his skull isn't cracked by that blow from the boot-

jack, it's harder than ivory. He won't bother us any."

"I reckon it 'll be a good spell before he wakes up," Red chuckled; "and when he does we'll be well out to sea. You pick 'em pretty, I'll say," he added, bending over the unconscious girl, who lay white and helpless in the bottom of the boat. "She's a beauty. But you'll have to treat her rough. She won't be easy to tame, if I know women."

"I like 'em fiery," Bud answered easily. "You've got something when they're tamed. White, fragile lilies were never in my line."

"Well, you keep an eye on her while the boys and me gather up our traps. We orter be getting out to sea in an hour at the latest."

Bud sat down in the prow of the boat while the others went further up on the beach. For ten minutes or more they busied themselves gathering up provisions, tobacco, firearms and cooking utensils with which they returned to the boat.

IN that time Sybil had regained consciousness with an amazing clarity that gave her cunning. She lay motionless, her eyes closed, after one sharp scrutiny had informed her of the presence of the man beside her.

She was in the grip of a horror that made her body like ice and her brain on fire.

But at present her own peril counted for little. Was Rod dead? The uncertainty was torment. She had a desire to shriek—a feeling that if she did not know at once whether he was living or not she would go mad.

If he was dead it mattered very little what happened to her. Destruction one way or another—what difference?

One thing stood out uppermost in

her mind, the fact that he had never known she loved him.

If only once he had taken her in his arms, had kissed her, and she had told him that Ted Sherry meant less than nothing to her, that her marriage had never been consummated, and that she loved him, even death would not be so terrible.

She felt, without looking, that the man in the prow of the boat was studying her. She had not seen his features plainly, but she was certain he was the one Rod had punished that afternoon, the one who had sworn to get even.

She heard voices and footsteps approaching. The boat lurched as some boxes were thrown into it: followed by the three seamen, but she dared not open her eyes.

Under the folds of her skirt her hands clasped and unclasped. The boat moved, and the lap of oars and switch of waves about her informed her they were leaving the island.

What to do? Any attempt at escape would be thwarted. Her puny strength against four men—maybe more! Common sense told her they would not go far in a rowboat.

Hope that they might go back to the hut to see whether their victim was alive welled within her, but died as she heard the ringleader speaking.

"Lucky you saw that jane to-day, Bud," said the gruff voice, "or we'd 'a' sailed to-night without her, and you'd have been a bachelor!"

"If this one don't come to pretty soon she won't be any use to me," Bud retorted. "Never saw one laid out so long."

"Good thing she is out. I can't abide yowling females. At least we'll get her on the *Lizzie B* alive. Maybe if she hadn't fainted she'd try jumping overboard, and while I like women, I

don't like none of 'em well enough to risk having a leg bit off to rescue."

THE shudder that shook Sybil's slight frame would have been perceptible had there been light enough for any to see.

The sharks! What chance had she to escape in that shark-infested water? What chance to reach Rod and save him if he was still alive?

And yet she and Rod had swum ashore in safety a few days before. He had faced death—a horrible death—when he leaped after her. Had he saved her for this?

One of the men called "Halloa!"

She risked opening her eyes for a moment, and saw the boat had drawn near the side of the schooner, and that a rope ladder was lowered.

She held herself rigid when Bud lifted her in his arms and with perfect ease climbed the ladder.

They had rowed but a short time. That indicated the schooner was very close to shore.

How soon would they sail? How many men were on board? She remembered the Chinamen Rod had seen. Those luckless individuals who trusted their lives and money to a scoundrel like Red Peterman to be smuggled into the United States.

She was lying on the deck. She felt the rough boards. Smelled a stale, fishy odor.

Suddenly a bright light was flashed in her face, and a bottle placed to her lips. Raw whisky stung her lips.

"Fetch her to now," Peterman ordered. "We can handle her here all right."

She strangled, coughed, as the liquor was forced between her teeth. She tried to fight it off, to push away the arm that encircled her shoulders, then

opening her eyes, stared into Bud Keller's face.

There were other men on deck, rough, barearmed and barefooted sailors who leered at her in amazement, and several sick-looking Chinamen.

She could not choke back a scream.

"There, there, my girl," Bud soothed. "It's all O. K. I won't let any of the Chinks hurt you. You're safe with me. Jest as safe as you were on the island."

SHE cowered away from him, her very soul sick with revulsion.

Waves of red flame seemed to envelop her, to come between her and that evil, smiling face. It required all the control of her tortured brain to keep from swooning again.

She covered her eyes with her hands, trying to blot out Bud Keller's features, the glitter of his black eyes. If he touched her again she would go mad.

But he didn't. He tossed the bottle of whisky to the Chinamen and laughed gayly:

"Come on, my hearties, have a drink on me! There's going to be a wedding on board to-night. Meet the bride! She hasn't much taste for me yet, but after she knows me better she'll be crazy about me."

"To the bride and groom!" came from a dozen drunken voices.

"Come on, sweetie!" Bud dragged the swaying girl to her feet. "Bow to the gentlemen!"

"Have a heart!" muttered a squeaky voice.

Sybil saw its owner, a warped, emaciated old man, with a shining bald head, push his way through the group of sailors.

"The kid's sick. Let her rest up a while. Lemme take her downstairs."

"Sure, sure," Bud answered jovially. "I guess she's safe with you, Baldy; no woman could stand your pate."

He pushed her toward the old man.

Grateful for even a moment's respite, sick with physical as well as mental revulsion at the scene about her, almost mad with terror, Sybil stumbled forward. Yellow, claw-like fingers grasped her arm.

"Steady, steady," the squeaky voice admonished.

He piloted her toward a doorway. A lantern hung overhead, throwing a sickly gleam of yellow light on a sordid dirty hatchway and a narrow flight of stairs.

He descended slowly, bidding her follow. Half dazed, she did so, through a dark passage cluttered with boxes and crates. She saw him open a door.

A burst of noisy laughter came from above. And the sound of feet shuffling over the deck. Some one was playing an accordion, others were dancing. Ribald voices rose in a vulgar song.

She saw a small room with two tiers of berths. Ungovernable panic seized her.

"Oh, save me! Save me!" she screamed. "If you've any heart in you, save me from that man!"

HIS forehead, shiny and dome shaped, a crisscross of leathery lines puckered over his shrewd green eyes.

"There ain't a chance," he said slowly, "but—" His eyes wandered to an open porthole—"if I was a girl—I'd—a heap ruther give myself to the sharks than to Bud Kellers."

She looked at him steadily, the sinister meaning of his words percolated through her half-crazed brain.

He stepped back. She entered the room, then he left her alone and closed the door.

She crossed to the porthole and leaned out. She was not far above the water. It was phosphorescent in the moonlight, gleaming with silver patches—and calm and smooth as a mirror. Scarcely a ripple stirred it.

Those men in an orgy of drunkenness would never hear the splash if she leaped.

If they did hear, not one but was too big a coward to follow her. The sharks were at once her menace and her protection.

There was a chance—one chance she might reach shore in safety—she and Rod had done it before—

But, what then? Rowboats could follow and bring her back. No, they must not know she had escaped.

She stood staring down at the water. Life was sweet. She was young, and to leap would be to defy death, but Rod might be dying! It seemed she heard him call.

The call impelled her to raise herself on her elbows, to balance herself on the ledge—to lean forward—farther—farther—then finally to loosen her hold.

She choked back a cry as she slipped and slid into the cool depths that closed softly like a moist blanket around her.

Just for a second she lay motionless, then with quick strokes she headed toward the island. Her skirt impeded her movement. She unfastened it and kicked it from her.

Her own shadow in the water terrified her. The black outlines made her think of cruel gaping maws, of black fins and sharp teeth. The splash caused by her moving arms sounded like something following her. She forgot

her fears of the men on the *Lizzie B*, in her fear of the menace in the sea.

"I'm coming, Rod," she sobbed.

SHE could see the stretch of sandy beach in the moonlight, but it seemed very far away, just like a silver bar which, as she drew nearer, seemed to recede.

She turned her head once and looked back. Evidently her absence had not been discovered on the *Lizzie B*, for the laughter and drinking still continued.

The thumping of her heart hurt her. She breathed with difficulty. Her arms felt heavy. Suppose her strength failed her before she met her goal?

A streak of black some yards distant made the breath almost leave her body, chilled her into immobility until she saw that it did not move, and was probably a mass of seaweed.

She swam faster, her arms and legs carrying her forward almost automatically.

When her hand touched sand she was beyond feeling relief, and dragged herself slowly, laboriously, up onto the beach. There she lay, spent and panting, for several moments, completely relaxed and forgetful of danger.

She looked listlessly about her, only conscious that she was no longer in the water, that she lay on warm dry sand.

A mass of rocks reared black and forbidding on her right. There were a few red embers remaining of the fire that had burned steadily for days; scattered about them were empty cans and bottles, bits of food and dried twigs.

A chill seized her; her teeth chattered and her body shook convulsively. She pulled herself near the remnant of the fire and tried to warm herself by its feeble glow.

Then she noticed that this was not the fire Rod had tended, that she was on the other side of the island, separated from him by that stone barrier!

She managed to rise, and staggered blindly toward the rocks. There she paused and stared in the moonlight. She could never scale them. She hadn't the strength nor the agility.

But the thought of plunging again into the black water made her shudder with terror. Every wave carried a menace.

Her straining gaze seemed to pick out long, sinister figures. Twice she had escaped without injury, the third time such an attempt would be fatal.

She *must* climb that wall!

HER hands fumbled for a niche in the rocks, and found one.

She pulled herself up to her chin, and searched for another hold.

Bit by bit she dragged herself upward. Twice she slipped back, the jagged rock cutting cruelly into the flesh of her legs.

Her hands were bleeding, her finger nails broken, but at length she reached the top and balanced there unsteadily before she let herself go.

She fell on her hands and knees into the soft sand on the other side. She was insensible to pain now. More cuts and bruises from broken pebbles and clam shells passed unfelt.

She began to run. Her desire now to reach Rod was so intense she was like a mad thing.

The trade wind had shifted, turned cooler and brisk. It whipped the thin folds of her one garment about her, and dried it close to her slim young body.

Banks of clouds drifting over her head merged together, grew darker, and blotted out the moon.

Before her, black and thick with shadows, loomed the jungle. Like gnarled sinister specters the banyan trees blocked her entrance, their roots and branches huge arms ready to enfold and crush out the breath of life.

Weird eerie noises came to her. The rustle of leaves, like the whispering of ghostly lips, the crackle of twigs like footsteps passing over them, the hoot of an owl, the croak of a frog.

She remembered the great snake coiled around the trunk of a tree the first morning she had entered the jungle, the monkeys that had frightened her, the hundreds of crawling, stinging biting insects that infested that shadowy wood. Every terror seen, felt and heard, gripped her.

The wind was rising now. It tore at her hair, and shrieked through the palm trees, beating their fronds together. The billowy clouds were gone and the sky overhead was a canopy of black velvet.

She thrust her hands out before her, and stumbled forward. Thorns cut into her ankles, tangled vines wound themselves about her legs. She tripped against a fallen log and fell, only to rise and struggle on.

She could not see except dimly. Only instinct gave her direction, and the urge to reach the man she loved.

After what seemed an eternity she came to the pool. She stepped into it over her ankles before she realized she had found it. Then she was sure of the way to go, and plunged onward, heedless of vines that whipped across her face.

When she reached the clearing she saw the fire still burning feebly. Near it was a dark splotch on the sand, a figure lying motionless.

"Rod!" she sobbed. "Rod!"

She flung herself beside him and

gathered his head and shoulders against her bosom. He groaned, and she laughed hysterically in her thankfulness that he lived.

"Rod! My darling! You're alive! I've come back to you. Nothing could keep me from you, those men, the sharks—the jungle—*nothing* can separate us!"

She rained light kisses upon his face, his hair, his throat. She kissed his hands, and held him closer.

"You've got to *live*. You've got to. I couldn't endure life if you didn't. If you die, darling, I'll throw myself in the sea."

A moan was his response.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER a little Sybil grew calmer. Tears and caresses would not revive him.

She must control herself.

Seizing a tin, she went down to the edge of the water and filled it, then returned and bathed his face. Her hands were sticky. There was blood on them from the wound in his head.

She tore away part of her abbreviated skirt and, making a bandage, bound it tightly about his head.

He moved restlessly and muttered incoherently.

Thinking he was regaining consciousness, she leaned over to hear what he said, but caught only the words: "Louise! Sherry! You cad—"

She was terribly tired, so tired she had difficulty in sitting erect. Her eyelids drooped, and her shoulders hunched forward. Several times she nodded.

The men on the schooner were forgotten, only her anxiety for Rod remained.

Suppose he should never regain con-

sciousness? Suppose he died and left her alone on this island, just after she had reached safety?

But she hadn't reached it. Neither she nor Rod were out of danger while the *Lizzie B.* lay in the harbor.

She sprang to her feet. If they should return now—Rod couldn't fight—they would kill him and take her away again.

She looked about wildly. The hut was no shelter. She felt certain that Peterman and his crew would return, once they knew she had escaped. They surely were aware by now that she was gone.

The storm might prevent them from following to-night, but they had boats, and it would require no effort to come ashore by daylight.

She must hide. They did not know that jungle as she and Rod knew it. They would look for her on the beach, or near the hut. She must hide in the jungle.

But had she strength to carry Rod that distance?

She placed her hands under his shoulders and pulled him gently. He groaned again.

"I must do it, honey," she whispered, knowing that he couldn't understand her. "If they come back and find you, we haven't a chance. I'll try not to hurt."

SHE tried to lift him, but failed dismally. Slowly, carefully she dragged his weight over the sand, pausing now and then to wipe the cold sweat from her face or to bend anxiously over him.

Oh, God, if there was only something she could do for him, give him something to ease the pain, something to prevent a fever! She was so helpless, so completely, utterly helpless.

with nothing but her great love to give her strength.

At the edge of the thicket she listened tensely. She thought she heard the sound of oars lapping the water; but it was only the wind and the patter of rain starting to fall.

Then she began a greater struggle. With almost superhuman effort she raised him to his feet and wrapped his arm about her shoulder, willing desperately that he stand.

"Try, honey, try!" she sobbed. "You've got to. Oh, Rod, *try* to understand! It means your life. They'll kill you if they find you. Oh, *please* stand up!"

He mumbled—her name, Ted's, Louise's—and seemed to come out of his oblivion for a moment. Leaning heavily on her, he took several steps, faltered, and slumped into the marshy ground.

She dragged him up, and again pushed on.

They were well away from the beach now, in the thicket. She looked for the darkest spot, all brush and vines and interlapping trees. She pulled him toward it and, shutting her eyes, plunged in.

The vines and branches closed about them. She sank to her knees in ooze; but continued to drag him through slush and marshland until she found a dry spot. Then she dropped on the ground beside him and burst into hysterical sobs.

The rain began to fall in torrents. Vivid streaks of lightning lashed the sky and illuminated the dense foliage around them. She bent over Rod, striving to shield his body with her own.

An hour passed. The rain ceased abruptly. Completely exhausted, still holding his head in her arms, she slept,

conscious even in her sleep that he groaned pitifully.

CHAPTER XIX

ROD awakened her. A murky dawn filtered through the thick roof of branches and leaves, and sketched the pallid pain-drawn features of the man beside her. It was his moan that had aroused her out of her heavy sodden sleep.

She moved, sat up, and looked at him anxiously. His eyes met hers with a lucid expression in their depths, and he tried to smile.

"You know me?" she gasped, with a choke in her throat.

"Yes. How—how did we get here?"

His voice was husky, and he spoke with great difficulty.

"I brought you. Don't talk, please. It may give you fever."

She touched his hand. It felt dry and parched.

"You brought me? Why?"

"Those men. I was afraid they would come back."

His brows contracted. For the moment he had forgotten the abduction, the fight.

"How did you get away? I remember—Peterman had you in his arms—just before—"

"I swam. They were drunk, and I jumped overboard. They didn't know it, but I was afraid when they found me gone they would come back and kill you."

A deep flush stained her cheeks and mounted to the moist tendrils of black hair on her forehead. She remembered those hours of darkness when she had held him in her arms and embraced him with all the fervor of her repressed passion. Had he known then who she was—what she was doing?

"You swam"—wonderingly—"and you dragged me here! You must have dragged me—for I don't remember walking! And you such a little thing—I don't know how you did it!"

He tried to raise himself to a sitting posture, but found it impossible.

"Please," she urged again, "don't move—or talk. You've been ill, and you mustn't do anything to make the fever worse."

"My head does hurt like fury. That beast gave me an awful wallop. Wonder he didn't finish me. God, I should have killed him!"

He closed his eyes as a spasm of pain twitched his white lips.

Her hands gripped in anguish over her futility to ease him. Then quickly, deftly she removed the bandage and hurried away to the pool. There she hesitated.

The water was clear, but stagnant. She had heard there were healing properties in salt water. Dared she risk going into the open?

The *Lizzie B.* might still be in the harbor and its owner on shore. So far she had heard nothing to indicate this was so—but the danger still threatened.

On the other hand, if Rod's wound were not cared for he would die, and what would her own safety matter then?

ONCE more she pushed her way through banyan roots, clumps of bamboo and rank weeds, until she reached the clearing. There she shaded her eyes and scanned the horizon.

The rain of the night before had extinguished the fire. The hut where she had spent so many restless nights was practically in ruins.

Tears blurred her eyes. Suddenly

both became dear. Rod's hands had built them, had made a crude home for her and striven to give her comfort. If he died she had nothing of him to hold as a sacred memory.

Civilization was very far away now. No existence remained but that on this island of gold and orange and crimson, this tiny jewel of multitudinous blossoms dropped into a turquoise sea.

Ted Sherry, her father, her mother—the home she might never see again, were all part of a dim past that she must forget.

There was nothing but this present, and the man whose breath was her breath, whose life meant her life. She loved him so that every stab of pain he suffered cut like a knife blade into her heart.

He didn't love her, but even that did not matter. He was dependent upon her. He needed her. Without her he would die.

She stepped cautiously, fearful that eyes were watching her from behind the hut ruins, that some of the villainous crew of the *Lizzie B.* might be lying in wait to pounce upon her.

At the spot where the fire had been, she found the empty tin they had used to boil water. She filled it from the sea and started back.

Then she remembered there were provisions in Rod's hut, still part of the slab of bacon, some coffee, and a few cans of the goods he had purchased from Red Peterman.

They would need them. She gathered up what she could carry and stepped out of the hut. As she did so she heard a sound that made every muscle tense.

Voices and paddling oars!

They had waited until daylight to search for her, just as she feared.

The coffee and can of beans slipped

from her arms. As yet the boat and its occupants were not in sight. A clump of bamboo hid her from the shore line.

With her tin of water she plunged into the thicket, choosing her steps carefully lest she spill the precious fluid, but moving rapidly.

SHE reached Rod's side and dropped down beside him.

"They're here!" she whispered. "They've come back. I heard them."

waited, her hand grasping the feverish one of the man. At times she held her breath, fearful that even it might be heard.

Rays of sunlight, sickeningly hot,



A crackle of twigs smote her ears. They had come into the jungle to find her!

She wasn't certain that he understood, for there was a film over his eyes, and his gaze met hers blankly. She bathed his forehead and face, then saturated the bandage with salt water.

"Don't move!" she whispered again, placing her lips against his ear. "I don't think they'll find us."

For hours, it seemed to her, she

trickled through the green canopy and made the moist ground steamy.

A band of red ants came toward her, an undulating ribbon of terra cotta. She remembered stories she had read of ants that destroyed human beings, and wondered if these would attack her. But they passed on, their objective a huge, fuzzy caterpillar.

Bees buzzed around her. Myriads of mosquitoes, butterflies. Again and again she was stung.

But Sybil was insensible to heat or physical discomfort. Her gaze darted here and there, trying to penetrate beyond the screen of the brush and roots.

Rod's eyes were closed. His chest rose and fell with a slow rhythm which told her he was asleep. Subconsciously she prayed that the sleep would be health giving, and that he would not awaken with a cry.

A crackle of twigs, an oath, then a loud "Halloa!" smote her ears. They had come into the jungle! The man with the lisp and the black eyes was looking for her near the pool!

She stretched herself flat on the ground, her body pressed into moss and weeds until she seemed part of the dense underground.

Her nerves tingled as though strung with little electric wires. Every sound registered. They were not far away. Scarcely ten feet from where she lay.

"Oh, bosh! Bud—what's the use? If she didn't drown, the sharks got her. How's any one gonna make the island in a storm and a sea full of man-eaters? Come on, you've held us up long enough."

She knew it was Red Peterman speaking.

"I thought perhaps"—the hesitating, lipping voice—"if she did reach the island—she'd come to this pool."

"Well, you see she ain't here. You can stay and search the rest of the blasted place if you like, but I'm not itching to die of snake bite, and we've hung around too long as it is. No fool woman's worth it."

For one horrible moment Sybil fancied the screen of shrubberies that separated her from her pursuers moved, then she heard the Spaniard:

"You win. What I can't understand though, is what became of the man you bashed over the head."

"Went goofy, probably, and walked out into the sea. He's not here, and I'm not going to lose any sleep over him. I got trouble enough as it is with them Chinks. They're howling to go." He laughed brutally. "They're sure looking for trouble, and they'll get it before we hit the States."

The voices died away with the sound of receding steps, but Sybil did not move.

For a long time she lay as motionless as the boy.

CHAPTER XX

IT was late afternoon of the next day before Sybil ventured out of her hiding place, and then only because of the absolute necessity for water.

Rod was muttering deliriously. His lips were swollen and parched with thirst. She had dipped a bit of cloth into a stagnant puddle and bathed his lips with the moisture, but that was not enough. Not even for her, either, for she was light-headed and faint.

She parted the screen and glanced about. A flock of wild parrots set up a clamor at her appearance. A tiny furred animal darted wildly away, while overhead a monkey chattered vindictively, but there was no indication of any human being within miles.

She filled her tin can with water from the pool and drank greedily. It gave her strength. Then she carried some back to Rod.

His head sagged when she raised it, and she had to force the water between his teeth. After a little the brick flush on his cheeks died down a little, and she drew a deep sigh of relief.

She was hungry. The gnawing pain in her stomach was caused by hunger. It seemed strange to her that this could be so when she was so miserable.

She looked at the boy, sunken cheeked, hollow-eyed, with a heavy growth of beard, and a pathetic smile twisting her lips.

Rod Bannister, the millionaire!

What would his friends in Miami say if they saw him now? The poorest hod-carrier was better off than he.

She looked at her own mud-stained legs, bruised and scratched, touched her tangled hair, and felt an irresistible desire to laugh hysterically.

Suddenly she burst into tears, and beat her hands together, rocking her body in a mad fashion.

All that had happened couldn't be true. She couldn't be Sybil Copely and have these things real. She was in a nightmare, a horrible nightmare.

BUT she wanted Rod to be real. She bent over him and studied his face as though to stamp it forever on her memory. She mustn't lose that. She touched his eyelids with the tip of her finger, stroked his hair.

Then, drawing him into her arms, she kissed him again and again.

"You're mine," she sobbed. "Mine! If you die you're mine. If you live you're mine. I love you. I love you."

He stirred and looked up at her wonderingly.

"Sybil," he breathed. "Sybil."

"Do you know me? Do you know me, Rod, or are you dreaming, too?"

A faint smile etched itself about his lips, flickered them a moment and died. His eyes closed again.

"Oh, God, recognize me!" she cried. "I can't stand it if you go on calling for Louise and cursing Ted. I know Ted is a rotter. I hate him. Do you

hear? Rod, I hate him. He fooled me. I learned that first night what he'd done to Louise, but I didn't know before! Do you believe me? I'd never have hurt Louise so if I'd known she loved Ted. That made me loathe him. I wasn't his wife—*ever!* Just having a ceremony performed didn't make me his wife, did it, Rod? It isn't wrong for me to love you, is it? It's as natural to love you as it is for me to live. I don't care if it is wrong, I love you."

She lapsed into silence, suddenly ashamed at her outburst.

If she needed food she must find it. There were bananas and nuts within reach, and not far away other things.

Days of hardship had taught her endurance. She had learned to climb trees, to forage. Rod had been a good teacher, and had given her information he had gleaned from his camping days. She was muscular and strong, if small, and necessity made possible much that would have been impossible before.

And so she fed herself and the sick man. For six steaming hot days and damp chilling nights she never relaxed vigilance, and fought for his life.

The first three days she stayed close to her hiding place, going no further than was absolutely necessary, for she still feared the return of the men from the schooner.

On the fourth day she went to the clearing on the other side of the jungle and stared off at the sea. As far as her gaze carried her there was no ship in sight. The *Lizzie B.* had sailed away!

A FEELING of desolation swept over her. But for the man who heard nothing of what she said, who answered her in muttered phrases of no meaning, there was no human

being on that waste of sand and jungle but herself.

There might never be any other human. They might live to grow old and bent, with no companionship but chattering monkeys, screaming macaws, parrots and parraqueets, humming birds, insects, and reptiles.

They might never see civilization again, but continue on and on until they reached a primitive state that asked for nothing more than food and a place to sleep.

It might have been better that she had died when the wave swept her over the side of the *Diana*. Rod would not be in danger—he might now be in Miami with his friends, enjoying the luxury his money afforded, and she would not be suffering this insatiable heart hunger. Or if his yacht had sunk he might now be in a watery grave, along with the others.

She made a bed of the seaweed she brought from his hut, and after repeated efforts she built a fire in the manner he had used. The bag of coffee she found on the beach where she had dropped it, a can of milk among the provisions, and she forced the liquids she boiled between his teeth.

Almost incredibly he mended. The fever began to abate, and on the sixth day he recognized her again. He looked at her, a wistful smile on his lips. Then he kissed her hand.

"Brave girl!" he said huskily. "I've been pretty sick, haven't I?"

"Terribly. I thought you'd die."

"That would have been tough on you—here alone."

HE smiled again, but his eyes were grave as they rested upon her. She had grown pitifully thin, all the warm, wholesome color under her tan had vanished.

Her arms were little more than bones covered with hardened muscle and taut skin. She looked like an emaciated child with her tousled black curls, her wide amber eyes darkened by the shadow of inky lashes.

His heart contracted as he realized how much she had suffered, what endurance had been required in the battle for life.

He had had dreams in his delirium. Dreams that she had whispered she loved him, that her arms had held him close, her soft hands cooled his brow.

He wished he could ask her if those dreams held any realities. But he hadn't the right.

He shook his head in an effort to sweep away unworthy thoughts.

"Let's have a try at the beach," he said.

"You feel strong enough *now*?"

"Think so."

She slipped her arms under his shoulders and slowly helped him to his feet. He stood there unsteadily.

"I'm afraid," he said whimsically, "that if any civilized person saw us now he'd be tempted to run, thinking we were savages. You're an altogether beautiful girl, Sybil, but even your dearest friend couldn't call you *chic* now."

"Nor your dearest friend call you well groomed," she retorted.

CHAPTER XXI

AGAIN the long days in the sunshine, baths in the pool, endless inertia. Hours of futile activity. Hours of introspection.

Sybil made herself a dress of plantain leaves, fastening them together with vines. She stuck hibiscus in her hair, and wound strands of sea shells about her throat, ankles and wrists.

Always Rod held out the hope to her that rescue was not far away.

"It isn't possible some one doesn't know of this island," he said. "It isn't as if we were on the other side of the world. Some day we'll sight a ship, and they'll see us, and then, my dear, you can toss away all this finery and go back to severe tailor-mades."

They lost track of time. They knew nightfall and daylight, but the day of the week, the month, the hour were things unknown. Rod's watch was water-soaked and useless. But it seemed to them months had gone by.

If only he knew for certain that Sherry was dead, he would teach her to love him, and marry her in the manner of his forefathers.

Often he brooded over the blond boy who had wronged his sister, and his eyes would grow black with passion. He almost regretted he had not killed Ted the night he so blandly announced his marriage to Sybil.

But most of the time he was cheerful. His face expressed very little of what he thought. Sybil crawled into her own shell and hid her feelings likewise.

ONE night she lay in the darkness, her hands locked under her head, trying desperately to bring a picture of her home before her, when she heard footsteps behind her hut. They were so soft, almost stealthy, that the fear of intruders which had been only sleeping, sprang to life again.

Then a voice called her name softly: "Sybil!"

Her relief at hearing Rod's voice was so intense she almost fainted. She sprang from her bed of seaweeds, and running to the door, flung it open and herself into his arms.

"Why, honey, what is it?" he whis-

pered, holding her shaking figure close to him. "What is it?"

"I heard steps—I thought *they'd* come back!" she sobbed.

"There's a gorgeous view of the Southern Cross, and I thought if you weren't asleep you'd like to see it," he explained. "I didn't want to wake you if you were asleep, *that's why* I was so quiet. I'm sorry I frightened you."

She looked up in his face. His features were etched in the moonlight, his nostrils quivering with suppressed feeling, his eyes dark and hungry!

A sob choked her. A shiver of exquisite ecstasy permeated her. She swayed toward him, closer—closer, until they were locked in each other's arms.

His face lowered, and his lips found hers, clung to them, until drunk with the poignant sweetness of the drink he had thirsted for and denied himself, he pushed her from him with a strangled cry.

"God! I didn't mean to do *that*! Forgive me, Sybil. Don't think me a beast."

"Why should I?" she answered simply, "when I've wanted you to kiss me. I've wanted you for so long—so long!"

"Wanted me to? Do you know what you're saying?"

"Yes. I love you, Rod. I've loved you—for a long time."

"Love me! And Ted Sherry—?" He choked over the name.

"I don't think I ever loved Ted. If I had I would have forgiven him, for there's nothing *you* could ever do that I wouldn't forgive."

"I don't understand."

He did not offer to touch her again, but stood with his hands knotted into fists at his side.

"Don't you?" She was courageous—

now. "Ted swept me off my feet, but when I learned about him and Louise—" His quick intake of breath made her hesitate—"every particle of affection I felt for him died. Our marriage was never—I was never truly his wife."

"Sybil!"

"It's true. Can't you see? I loved Louise—he made me wrong her—there was no excuse, absolutely none. And when what I felt for him died, I saw the man that you were—and I loved you."

"OH, my God!" he groaned. He dropped on the sand at her feet, and wrapped his arms about her slim body.

"And I've loved you. I've been in torment these days and nights. I've loved you until the thought of giving you up was almost beyond endurance. I've been bitter against Sherry for hurting Louise—but half that bitterness was jealousy over you. I'm eaten up with it. He'd won you, the first woman I ever loved.

"Night after night I've paced the sand," Rod went on eagerly, "trying to argue myself into sanity, trying to crush out this fire. But I love you—and now to know that you love me—what will we do, dear, *what will we do?*"

"If Ted is dead—" she said slowly. The wonder of knowing he cared made any future unhappiness seem impossible.

"We don't know that he's dead. It seems inconceivable that if the *Diana* was not lost in the storm no one came to our rescue—but there may have been reasons. And we may be here for years—"

Her fingers lingered on his rough head.

"I love you," she whispered. "Does it matter so much, if we love each other?"

He rose, almost impatiently, and walked away a few steps. She stood where he had left her, a small, elfin figure in the moonlight, and waited for him to come back to her.

He returned presently, and took her in his arms. He kissed her gently, as though she were a child, her tangle of curls, the hollow in her throat, her eyelids, the soft curve of her lips, then he held her head against his breast for a long time.

"You're sweet, Sybil," he said huskily; "so sweet and little and innocent. But you're strong. You must help me to be strong. I love you too much to hurt you—and unless you help me, I may."

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was no repetition of that scene.

Sometimes Sybil almost wondered if Rod had ever taken her in his arms and told her he loved her, for though he was kind, very gentle and considerate with her, he showed her no affection after that night.

He was very busy, and generally silent. He kept the fire burning brighter, and each day added bamboo rods to the pile he had made on the beach.

"I'm going to make a raft," he said, "when these become seasoned. I don't know how good it will be, but at least I can scout around and see if there is any land at all near. It wouldn't surprise me if we were close to the mainland, for all the wilderness of this island."

She wanted to say: "If you do find land and we reach home again, it will mean our separation," but she didn't.

Day after day she watched him carry the bamboo and pile it in the sun to season. Each pole seemed a death knell to their love.

She did not want to leave the island now. What were hardships when she faced them with the man who was her world?

She was alone when she first saw the tiny speck against the blue horizon. At first she thought it was a mirage, then a gull further out at sea.

When she realized that her eyes were not playing pranks on her, that the speck was slowly evolving into a ship, she trembled violently and gave a hysterical cry:

"Rod! Rod! There's a ship! A ship!"

HE came out of his hut at once, and stood beside her, shading his eyes. His hand trembled also, and his face became white and tense. For a moment he was deadly silent, then he smiled down at her.

"You're right, Sybil," he said hoarsely. "It is a ship. If only they see us!"

He leaped toward the fire, and thrusting a broken branch into it, waited until it sprang into flame. Then, waving it over his head, he dashed down to the water's edge.

He called "Halloa! Halloa!" several times, still waving the torch.

The vessel moved slowly. For a breathless second they thought it was keeping its steady course and was going to leave them behind, but it swung about and came toward them!

Sybil joined Rod, and when he dropped the torch, she placed her hand in his. His fingers gripped hers.

This was the end. For the present, at least. They were going home, and separation was inevitable.

He bent slowly, and kissed her. She quivered and clung to him.

"I—shall be sorry to leave," she said.

"Yes, it's a beautiful place. We might have been very happy."

"I *have* been happy, since I've known you love me," she answered.

"You told me you loved me that night, Rod," she added, when he didn't answer. "Was it the moonlight made you say it, or—"

"I love you."

His eyes darkened. His lips found hers again and held them for a breath-taking second. She pulled away with a little sob.

CHAPTER XXIII

MEANWHILE Louise had made no preparations for her wedding. None were really necessary, as there were to be no guests, only Mrs. Sherry and the minister's wife to act as witnesses.

The Rev. Dr. Alben, who had christened Ted, was to perform the ceremony at eleven o'clock, in Mrs. Sherry's drawing-room; then Ted was going to take her to a camp he owned in the Adirondacks, and bring her back to health.

The momentous day arrived, a sunny warm day in April, with sprigs of green peeping from the mounds of brown earth, and tiny buds bursting from leafless boughs.

Louise rose from her bed with a heavy weight of depression over her heart. She loved Ted. She had forgiven everything. She felt that he loved her, and that his momentary madness over Sybil would never be repeated again, that their lives would be happy together—yet she was miserable.

Crossing to the window, she stared out at the thin trickle of traffic on Park Avenue.

Once she had planned a church wedding, with an elaborate breakfast, with bridesmaids, festoons of flowers, all the flurry of dressmakers, shopping orgies, and a trip abroad. But a little old man and his somber wife were to meet in Mrs. Sherry's drawing-room, and join her for eternity to Ted.

There would not even be a breakfast. Just a ceremony, which after all was so little. There had been a ceremony performed over Ted and Sybil—but it had not made them man and wife.

A discreet knock made her turn from the window and draw the folds of her emerald satin peignoir about her slim figure.

The door opened cautiously. Mrs. Sherry edged herself in. She looked like a little bird, all in gray satin bordered with fox, above which her lovely white hair glistened.

She laughed wistfully when she saw Louise.

"Here's a telegram for you, dear."

Louise's hands trembled as they opened the envelope. When she read the message her face drained of color. She stood there, swaying, the typewritten words dancing crazily before her eyes. Her lawyer in Miami had sent the message:

Rod radioed he and Sybil rescued last night by revenue cutter. Now on way to Miami.

Rod was alive! Sybil was alive! *And Ted was not free to marry her!*

"Oh, my God!" Louise moaned.

"What is it?" Mrs. Sherry turned at the choked cry. "What is it, Louise? Good heavens, you're as white as a sheet!"

"Ted!" she gasped. "I've got to see Ted at once."

"Yes! Yes, of course. But—is it bad news? Is somebody dead?"

"No!" Louise burst into a shriek of hysterical laughter. "No! He's alive! Rod is alive!"

Mrs. Sherry looked at the girl as though she'd gone bereft of her senses. Then she jerked the telegram from a shaking hand, read it, and darted out of the room.

The girl sat there motionless, her whole world crushed and toppling about her ears, joy and tragedy so intermingled she was numb.

A FEW minutes later Mrs. Sherry and Ted joined her. Ted was in a dressing gown. His face under his cropped yellow hair was the color of ivory, his nose pinched and quivering.

He crossed to Louise and took her shaking, icy hands in his. Mrs. Sherry fluttered behind him, scarcely less pale and much more bewildered.

"I'm so glad for your sake, Louise," he said. His voice shook. Louise's dark eyes met his blue ones. There was agony in both faces.

"Leave us alone, will you, mother, please?" he broke in upon the old lady's excited comments.

"Of course—but I don't understand."

She hesitated, then walked stiffly out of the room, closing the door behind her.

"Louise—darling—don't look so—so dead." He pressed her hand against his mouth. "You're happy Rod is alive? Just think of it, Rod is alive!"

"Yes. Oh, yes; but—do you realize this is our wedding day, and we can't marry?"

"Yes, I realize it. But I sha'n't

give you up, Louise. If you can't become my wife to-day, you shall the moment I'm free."

"Free?"

"Sybil doesn't want me. I'll beg her to have the marriage annulled. She'll do it for your sake, Louise, no matter what she thinks of me."

THAT ten days of waiting for the arrival of Sybil and Rod was a trying period. Louise trembled at the thought of meeting her brother. She was joyous, yet fearful. Rod would undoubtedly raise objections to her marriage with Ted, and be quite justified in doing so.

But time dragged by, and one early morning found her waiting in a car at the docks with Ted, watching the gray hulk of the revenue cutter as it drew near to shore.

"Steady," Ted whispered, pressing her hand. "Steady."

"I feel as though I were going to faint," she answered. "Wouldn't it be terrible if I fainted when I saw Rod?"

"I'm glad it's too early for a gang to be down here," he said. "But you mustn't faint."

Then she saw Rod, bronzed, broad-shouldered and commanding, and beside him a small figure which she recognized instantly as Sybil.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks while she shouted, "Rod! Rod!" and "Sybil! Sybil!"

A black cloud swept away the smile on Rod Bannister's face when he saw who was with his sister. Sybil lagged behind timidly when Rod leaped from the gangplank and gathered Louise in his arms. Then she accepted Ted's outstretched hand and, as Louise turned from her brother, kissed her tenderly.

They climbed into the car. The two men together, the girls in the seat behind. But Rod did not start the engine. He looked steadily at Ted. Then he said:

"Sherry, I want you to know something before you're an hour older. I love Sybil, and intend to make her my wife just as soon as she can set aside her marriage with you."

Louise gave a hysterical laugh.

Ted's face was grave. He looked over his shoulder at Sybil.

"Do you love Rod, Sybil?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, I love him."

"And I—I was going to ask you to free me. I've realized also—our marriage was a mistake. I'm glad you've found the right man."

THREE months later a cryptic telegram from Sybil informed Louise that she was free, and waiting for Rod to join her. The "mad marriage" had been annulled.

There was a double wedding one late afternoon in June, in the modest little Copely apartment.

Louise and Ted went to the cabin in the Adirondacks. Rod and Sybil, obsessed with the spirit of adventure, set sail in a new yacht to revisit a certain bamboo hut in the Garden of Eden, and live over the tender memories of love's dawning.

That island, by the way, Peterman will not see again, for he is residing now in a gray somber building with iron-barred windows, surrounded by a well-guarded, high stone wall.

He was captured by the crew of the same revenue cutter which had rescued Rod and Sybil from their lonely island paradise under the Caribbean moon.



The little nurse could not take her eyes from him

The Courage of Erin

Nurse Marna believed in fairies. But when she found that the one man loved another girl she wasn't so sure

By Beatrice Lubitz

THE most beautiful thing about Marna Kerry besides her lovely Irish face was that she never thought she was pretty at all.

Marna was raised in the Kendall Orphanage. Marna's father died when she was a baby and her mother shortly after. There was nothing for her old grandmother to do but place

Marna in the orphanage and there she "jus' growed" until she was old enough to work.

"I'd like to be a nurse," Marna decided one day as she talked to the cottage mother. So it was arranged that Marna enter St. Michael's Hospital Training School.

At first it was frightfully hard and

even though Marna was used to work she was so tired at the end of the day that she scarcely had the strength to go out and have a good time with the other student nurses. But as she got used to it—the routine of bed making, sterilizing and scrubbing the hospital equipment—she began to love it and dreamed about the day when she could take off the ugly blue dress of the apprentice for a trim white apron and white nurse's cap.

And at last the day came!

Of course the other girls realized that Marna was pretty but the day she put on the white dress and fluffed her golden blond hair under the little pointed cap they realized she was a beauty.

"Marna, you'll surely have a doctor fall in love with you," the girls said. But Marna only blushed.

"Nonsense," she answered. "When one of the doctors talks to me I get so nervous I could die."

After she graduated Marna was put on duty in the wards. The patients fell in love with her sweet manner and clear Irish blue eyes. But Marna, a child at heart, was too shy and bashful ever to flirt, and while the doctors at the hospital respected her for her conscientious ways they could not make her conscious of them.

"Marna, why don't you loosen up? You're so stiff," one of the nurses told her. "I know Dr. Gorman is crazy about you. He'd ask you to go out with him if you'd give him some encouragement."

"Elizabeth," Marna said seriously, "I want to make a success of my work. If love comes all right, but I cannot run around with every one."

"But Marna, how will you know when love comes if you don't step out and find out?"

"Oh, I'll know," Marna said wisely. "I don't mind stepping if I like the fellow, but just to go and get all tired out and then have to struggle in the taxi on the way home—oh, no, that's no fun!"

And so Marna waited for love—

NOT that she didn't enjoy dancing on Saturday nights when the nurses had affairs in the large reception hall in the Nurses' home. She went to the theater too, but Marna was Irish, and like all true Irish girls she secretly believed in fairies! Not the fairies of children's stories but in the fairies of fate. Somewhere in her innermost being she believed in a Knight who would some day come riding into her heart.

Marna never would confess this to a living soul. She dimpled and blushed when the other nurses teased her and she held her little turned-up nose high in the air when any of the patients got fresh.

One day the supervising nurse called her into her office.

"Miss Kerry," she said, "I have a call here for a private nurse. It is a hard job—an old paralytic—but they will pay well and they want a very capable and level-headed nurse. I don't mind telling you you are the best nurse here, and since this man was formerly on our Hospital Board I'm going to send you; that is, if you want to go, of course."

Marna's eyes filled with tears at the praise. "I'd love to," she said tremulously.

No good fairies spelled romance when Marna saw her patient! He was an old man, nearly seventy, but so wizened and gray and sick that he looked like ninety. Marna's sympathies flew out to him and she set to

work vigorously to make him feel comfortable.

The house was an old mansion, very austere and grand but about as cheerful as a tomb. On her first afternoon off, Marna bought flowers and ferns to brighten up the sick room. Mr. Grant, her old patient, lived alone except for a housekeeper who was as dismal and dreary as a November rain.

Marna did her best to draw her out and Mrs. Perkins did tell her that Mr. Grant was a bachelor. His cousin, Mrs. Leighton, and her daughter, Cora, were traveling in Europe. His nephew was in California. Mr. Grant had sent for all three now that he had had a stroke.

"And you can bet the mother and her daughter will be flyin' here," Mrs. Perkins said, "for they've been hoping he'll die for years," the housekeeper said in her acid voice.

"But why?" cried Marna.

The woman made a motion of counting money. "Cash," she said significantly. "He has plenty of it."

"But the nephew has the first right, hasn't he?"

The housekeeper laughed mirthlessly. "What's the odds? He's engaged to Cora so that it will all be in the family."

"Well I must say," Marna said, indignantly, as she beat her patient's eggnog into a thick creamy whip, "it's a darn shame and I hope that Dr. Lewis and I can keep him alive a long, long time. At least let them wait."

MARNA carried her eggnog into the sick room. Her patient slept. Marna studied the delicate blue-veined face.

"What a shame you must die," she said almost aloud. "I wish I could give you life."

In order to make up to the old man for his greedy relatives, Marna was doubly sweet to him. She anticipated his every wish and he was ever so grateful to the slim, smiling, eager girl who served him. After a while he began to talk about his family who were due the next day.

"Ralph is a good boy," the old man quavered. "Cora's a little wild, a little headstrong, but she's a nice girl too. Cora and her mother, that's my cousin Eda, will be here to-morrow, but Ralph won't be here for two days yet. He's taking care of some property for me on the coast."

"Do they live here?" Marna asked.

"No, my house is too old-fashioned but Ralph lives with me when he's not traveling."

All day Marna curiously awaited the arrivals. The express company brought a truckload of bags and boxes and the next morning the mother and daughter arrived.

Marna stood in the hall as the housekeeper opened the door.

"Hello, Perkins," came a hard voice, "I hope this is no false alarm this time. Cora and I are sick of these deaths that always end in recovery."

"And we were having such a good time, too," said the other voice.

"This time you won't be disappointed," mumbled the housekeeper under her breath as she went to meet them.

Marna rushed back to the sick room, too shocked to wait for the visitors at the head of the stairs.

"They're here," she said, straightening the pillow. Almost the next moment there was a knock on the door. Marna opened it. Without even looking at her the two women walked over to the sick man.

"Well, Cousin Ed, you look pretty sick."

He nodded his head as he feebly held out his hand. "Yes, Eda, I'm afraid this is the end."

"Dear Uncle Ed," Cora said and kissed his cheek.

"I hated to send for you," the old man continued, "but I wanted to discuss my will with you."

"Oh, of course," the mother said. She tried to keep the eagerness out of her voice as she sat down. It was then that they saw Marna who stood quietly by the window.

"Oh, that's the nurse!"

"Yes, and a fine, efficient girl she is. Marna, this is my cousin, Mrs. Leighton, and her daughter, Cora."

MOTHER and daughter exchanged glances. It was obvious that they were not pleased to see a young and beautiful girl tending the sick man. Marna nodded her golden head and would have left the room, but the old man begged her to stay.

"I want you to hear what I have to say," he said simply.

"Now, Eda, what I've got to say is short, but I've been talking it over with Brown, my lawyer, and he tells me I'm right in what I'm going to do. Besides," and the voice quavered, "Ralph's my own flesh and blood. After all, Eda, you're only a cousin by marriage."

"But, Ed," cried the mother, "haven't I been devoted to you as if I had been a blood cousin?"

"Oh, yes, yes, but this is the point." The old man shook violently, and Marna was half inclined to make him rest, but he pulled himself together and continued:

"I'm leaving you, Eda, ten thousand

dollars a year for life, and when you die it goes to Ralph. I'm giving Cora an out and out sum of ten thousand dollars because I don't believe a wife should have a private income." He chuckled a little and evidently failed to hear Cora's choke of rage. "I'm leaving Ralph the rest," he continued seriously, "because he is my own, my own brother's child. And since he's engaged to marry Cora, all the money will be in the family, anyway."

"Ed, I don't think it's exactly fair"—the mother tried to keep the rage and disappointment out of her voice—"but it's your money, and I guess I can't tell you how to divide it. Still, for all the years I've tended you and watched you, I don't think it's fair, especially not for dear little Cora, who has loved you like your own child."

Cora tried to look daughterly, but her anger was too apparent for the effort.

"But isn't Cora going to marry Ralph?" the old man asked. "What difference does it make? She'll be marrying a rich man!"

A paroxysm of pain passed over the old man's face and he nearly fell over in his chair.

Marna rushed to his side.

"I think you ought to leave him now," she said to the two, who were exchanging furious whispers. "He needs rest."

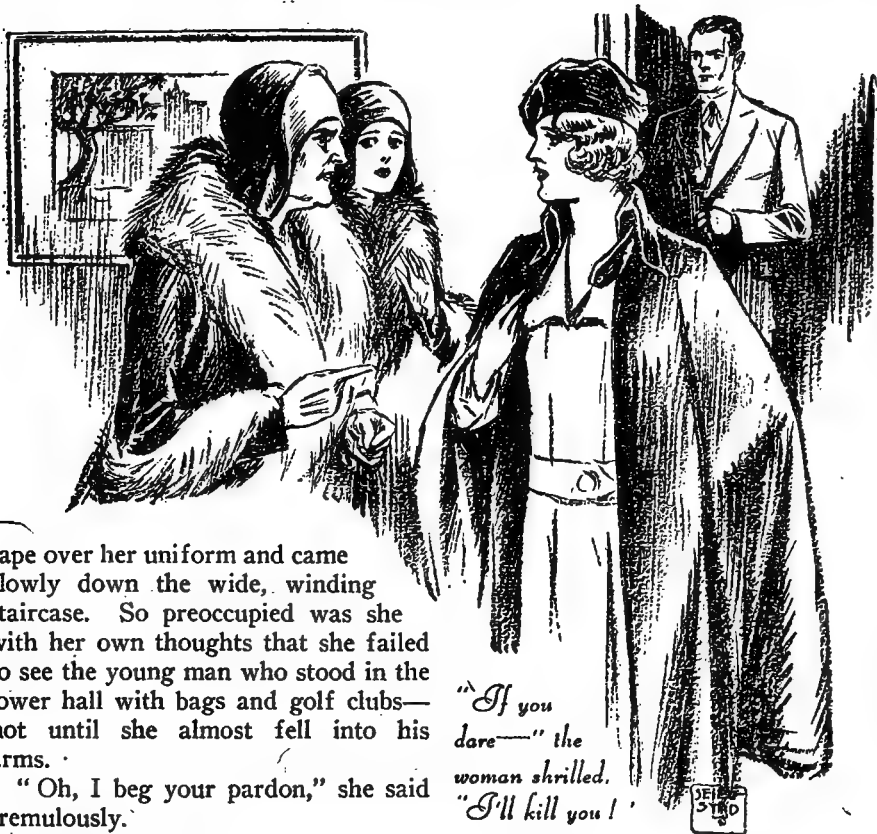
Without looking at her, they left the room.

THE rest of the day Marna was busy in the sick room. The housekeeper brought her supper to her room, and as she ate Marna thought about the two scheming women. "How they must hate him!" she thought to herself, and a great pity for the lonesome old man passed over

her. "I only hope the nephew is more worthy."

Supper over and her patient asleep, Marna decided to go out for a little walk. She dressed herself in her blue

He was straining to pass Marna, but he courteously waited for her to reach the last step before he ascended. He studied the sweet, heart-shaped face for a second, the deep violet eyes and



cape over her uniform and came slowly down the wide, winding staircase. So preoccupied was she with her own thoughts that she failed to see the young man who stood in the lower hall with bags and golf clubs—not until she almost fell into his arms.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said tremulously.

"I beg yours."

And then they stood face to face under the soft hall light. It was a second, fleeting as a breath of air, but to Marna it was eternity.

She had waited for this moment all her life. Her hands flew to her breast; for there, in the flesh, was the man of her dreams!

"I hope I didn't frighten you," he said kindly. "I'm Ralph Grant."

Already Marna could hear Cora coming downstairs.

"If you dare—" the woman shrieked. "I'll kill you!"

golden hair that escaped from under her dark blue beret.

"Oh, how do you do? I'm Marna Kerry, Mr. Grant's nurse. You're his nephew?" she asked timidly.

"Yes. How is he?" There was real anxiety in his voice.

"Not so well, but he's resting now," Marna said swiftly.

Cora was right above her, so she hastened her steps, but he was at the door first, holding it open for her.

Marna passed out into the night. Her cheeks were blazing, her eyes starry.

She rushed down the tall brown-stone stoop, but Cora's lazy greeting, "Howdy, darling," stung her ears. She heard him answer, "Cora, my black-eyed sweetheart," and then the door closed behind them.

She walked as in a daze. For him she had kept herself untarnished, pure and sweet. For this dream-man she had got herself the reputation of a man-hater and an iceberg. And now he entered and passed from her life as fleetingly as a summer sunset.

A great bitterness welled up in the girl's heart and tears filled her eyes. Cora had got him—Cora, who was so unworthy, cold and wicked. Yes, it was wicked to wait for an old man's death to inherit his money! Anger quickened Marna's footsteps. She walked and walked. Finally exhaustion made her turn her steps back.

The lower living room was lit by a dim lamp. As Marna passed up to her bedroom she heard voices: Ralph's deep booming tones and Cora's lisping, affected drawl.

Marna passed up to her room with bowed head. For the first time in her life she knew what it was to envy, to feel the pangs of jealousy gnawing at her heart. She hated herself for the feeling, but could not fight against it. Cora had wealth and beauty, and now had this man too; while she, Marna, who had known only poverty and misery all her life, must see the one man she might have loved the property of another!

YET no one would have guessed, to see her serene face the next morning, as she fed the paralyzed man his breakfast, the struggle she had had with her soul that night.

A few minutes later Ralph knocked and asked whether he might see his uncle.

In the morning light he was even more attractive. There was about him a warmth, a sincerity, a kindness that Marna knew was real and genuine.

"My dear uncle, how I rushed to get here in time. How do you feel? How did it happen?"

The old man smiled as he let his shaking hand rest in the strong one of his nephew. "My time has come, Ralph. Thank God I'm not afraid."

"Nonsense, uncle, you've got many useful years ahead of you."

The old man shook his head. "Where's Cora?"

"I guess she's still in bed." He laughed a little. "Cora is obviously not an early bird."

"Did Cora tell you how I fixed my will?" the old man asked.

"Yes, uncle, she did. But I don't give a whoop about your money. I want to see you get well. I'm going to wait for the doctor and ask him about your condition. I see you have an excellent nurse."

"Did you meet Marna?"

"I nearly killed her by walking right into her!"

Marna dimpled. "It was my fault."

"Even so, it was a pleasure."

In order to make her patient more comfortable, Marna threw her strong young arms about him to lift him.

"Oh, let me do that," Ralph said. "You'll injure yourself."

He lifted the old man up as if he were a child.

"How strong you are!" Marna marveled.

Just then Cora came in in her riding habit.

"Good morning, uncle; hello, dear," she said, pointedly ignoring Marna.

"Are you ready for our ride, Ralph?"

"Yes, honey, I'm coming. Do you mind if I go riding with Cora?"

"No. Go by all means," the old man said quickly. "But I did want to ask a favor of you children. I'm at the end of my rope, I feel it. I'd like to see you safely married before I die. Will you have the ceremony for me as soon as possible?" he asked wistfully.

"Oh, Uncle Ed, we wanted a big wedding," Cora demurred.

"I'm willing," Ralph said. "Can't we do this for uncle's sake, Cora? A big wedding is such a bore."

The girl's eyes narrowed. "I suppose so," she said sulkily, "but let's wait awhile yet."

"But not too long," the old man said. "I feel my days are short."

After they had gone, old Mr. Grant fell into a doze.

SLOWLY the days drew into weeks. The doctor came daily, but the patient remained the same, growing neither better nor worse. Marna would have been content in the old house with her work, but the sight of Ralph daily in attendance on Cora was like salt on an open wound. Although Ralph stayed in the sick room two or three hours a day, and Marna really waited for his coming, she was too honorable to flirt with him. He was another woman's man, and Marna fought against her feelings.

Did she imagine it, or did Ralph wait for her and devote all his conversation to her? Were the flowers he kept in the sick room meant for her? She had said once she liked tea roses.

Daily he sent a large bouquet of tea roses, ostensibly for the patient. But Marna wondered. . . .

It was plain to see that Mrs. Leigh-

ton and Cora were under a great strain. The atmosphere at the old mansion grew so tense that it was almost unbearable. Only Ralph seemed not to notice it, but he was in the office—he took care of his uncle's real estate business—most of the day.

One day, out of a clear sky, as Marna was in the kitchen preparing Mr. Grant's breakfast tray from the things that the housekeeper had cooked, Mrs. Leighton came in. Her face was pinched and drawn.

"Miss Kerry," she said abruptly, "your services are no longer required. I am going to nurse my cousin myself."

Marna was too surprised to speak at first, but before she had time Mrs. Leighton interrupted her. "I am going to give you a full month's pay instead of notice."

"But, Mrs. Leighton, you didn't hire me. I'll go, of course, but I think Mr. Grant is the one to say that he doesn't want me."

"Nonsense! Mr. Grant doesn't know what's best for him. I don't want to criticize you, Miss—whatever your name is; but I don't think you've done him any good."

"You have no right to say that," Marna said angrily. "I am not a doctor. I only follow the doctor's orders."

"I'm changing the doctor, too," the woman said grimly. "Neither of you have improved him. You can go now. I'll bring Mr. Grant his tray."

There was nothing to do but obey. Marna went to her room, dressed, and packed her bag. As she came down the stairs she met Mrs. Leighton in the hall.

"Here's your money, Miss Kerry," she said. "I've given you a full month's pay."

"Thank you. Please let me by. I wish to say good-by to Mr. Grant."

"You can't," the woman said spitefully. "He's asleep."

"I want to see," Marna insisted.

"Don't be rude, young woman. I said he's asleep, and he's asleep. Do you mean to insinuate I'm a liar?"

"No, but I'd like to look at him. I'm very fond of Mr. Grant."

"Well, it's not necessary. You can go."

It was not until Marna was in the street that she realized she would never see Ralph Grant again. A sharp pang went through the girl's heart. At least she had been very happy being under the same roof with him. But now—he was out of her life forever.

"**W**HY, Marna," the supervising nurse said in surprise, "how is it you're back? Is the old man better?"

"Something very peculiar happened, Miss Craig," Marna said. And then she told the supervisor the whole story, not even leaving out the great attraction she felt for Ralph.

"Did you hear Mr. Grant say he was leaving all his money to his nephew?"

"Oh, yes; I was in the room."

The head nurse looked thoughtful.

"Did he tell this to the nephew?"

"No. Ralph hated to talk about money. He really loves his uncle, but I do remember that he said Cora told him about the will."

"Did he say what Cora told him?" the supervisor asked shrewdly.

"No, he really didn't," Marna said thoughtfully.

"Humph! Then she could have told him anything. Do you know, Marna, I don't like the look of things at all."

"You don't think they'll do the old

gentleman any harm," Marna asked, alarmed.

"Hardly. He's dying, anyway; but the whole will business sounds queer, particularly the way you say the old lady was furious at not getting enough and her sudden change of mind to nurse him."

"Maybe she wants to get into his good graces so that he'll give her more," Marna suggested.

"Well, we'll keep our eye on the house and see what happens."

"I shouldn't want Ralph cheated," Marna said suddenly. "Oh, Miss Craig," she said impulsively, "he's such a wonderful chap!"

Her lips quivered and she had to run out hastily lest her supervisor see the sudden tears that gathered in her eyes.

The next morning Marna was going about her duties with a heavy heart, when word came to her that some one wished to see her in the reception room. Marna hastily went down to the small room off the main staircase. There, with his back to the window, stood the man whose image had not been erased from her mind for one minute since that first electric meeting on the stairs.

"Oh!" she said involuntarily.

HE came toward her.

"Miss Kerry, I—I was so sorry to hear that you had left. I wanted to say good-by to you and thank you. You've been so kind. It's just a little gift of appreciation."

He held a velvet box out toward her and snapped it open. There, nestled against violet colored satin was a tiny platinum and diamond wrist-watch. Delirious joy welled into her heart, almost stopping its beat. But it was not the gift—it was the effect of his near-

ness, his dark, smiling eyes. For an ecstatic moment she forgot that this knight of her dreams was the slave of a black-haired sorceress. She forgot everything but the vision of love.

"Oh," was all Marna could say. The words stuck in her throat, but she managed to add, "Thank you."

"Wait, let me put it on," he offered.

She held out her hand; tried to keep her arm from trembling as he clasped the watch on her slender wrist. "My poor uncle is in a coma," he told her as he fastened the ribbon; "he has not spoken a word in two days—since you left. But he seems to miss you. I am sorry Mrs. Leighton decided to nurse him herself. It's lonesome without you. There!" holding up her arm; "but it is not nearly as charming as you."

"Oh, Mr. Grant, it is lovely! I don't deserve such a lovely gift."

"You—you are the most beautiful—" And suddenly without warning he had grabbed her in his arms and was pressing kisses against her soft, surprised mouth.

For a moment the ecstasy of dreams come true—and then instantly the awakened memory of Cora. He was engaged to another! Why did he do this to her? If he really respected her, he would never dare do this when he was another woman's man. Anger like a rising flood nearly choked her. With all her might she thrust him from her, words tumbling furiously to her lips.

"How dare you?" she gasped. "You who are engaged to Cora Leighton. Oh, I hate you! You—I was going to help you, but I don't care now if they cheat you out of every penny! You—you—cheat!" she cried.

With a furious gesture she tore the watch from her wrist and flung it to him as she flew from the room. She

heard his voice calling her back, heard phrases of apology; but she was running up the stairs to her room, there to fling herself on the bed and sob as if her heart would break.

He was no different from the other men. He hadn't even respected her! He, for whom she had kept herself! She wrung her hands in agony as she realized that though her pride was hurt her heart still cried out for him; his kiss had thrilled her to the very core of her being.

The next morning brought a note of apology.

You were right. I am engaged to Miss Leighton. But I did not mean to insult you. I know I was a beast to do it, but you are irresistibly sweet. I am as unhappy as you, for I do love my fiancée. My mind is in a whirl. If a man can love two women, I do. But, believe me, I respect you more than any woman I have met in my life. And I apologize deeply. Please forgive me, and write me a word.

There was no doubting his sincerity. Marna walked about her work in a daze, wondering what to do. Then she penned him a short note. "I will never think of the incident again," she wrote, "nor do I wish to see you again."

FOLLOWED days of wonder and worry. Sometimes Marna felt she ought to write to Ralph and tell him what she knew about the will—but then she felt it would be silly; she had no proof that he didn't know about his being the sole heir. Only her intuition—and Marna believed in Irish intuition—made her feel that that Leighton woman was up to no good. But most of all she wanted to write because it would be an excuse to get in touch with him!

How Marna despised herself for her

desire to see him! It was so unfair, when he had told her himself that he loved Cora Leighton. Cora with her cloud of raven hair and her sulky, rouged mouth.

No longer did Marna turn down dates. She danced and went out every free night she had. From men whom she had treated with cool contempt she now accepted favors, but still she could not let them kiss her. The memory of Ralph's kisses still lingered on her lips; she clung to the memory.

About eight days after Ralph's visit Marna read in the paper of the death of old Edward Grant. He had died without regaining his power of speech. Poor old man! Marna's heart contracted with pity for him.

Miss Craig, the supervisor, became very much interested in the Grant case and told Marna she was eagerly watching the papers for the announcement of the will.

Just seven days later the papers carried the story of the will of the millionaire, Edward Grant. There were the usual bequests to charity, the hospitals, his college. The bulk of his fortune, however, went to his "dear cousin, Eda Leighton," with equal, though considerably lesser shares, to his nephew and Cousin Cora.

Marna was in Miss Craig's office as they read the notice.

"My dear," Miss Craig said excitedly, "there is dirty work in this."

"He said distinctly that he was leaving everything to Ralph and only ten thousand dollars to Cora and ten thousand dollars a year for life to Eda Leighton."

"You ought to see his lawyer, Marna."

"But Miss Craig, his lawyer was Clarence Brown. I remember distinctly. This will names a John Benjamin

and Mrs. Leighton, Cora and this Benjamin as executors."

"They don't even name the blood nephew as an executor."

"Perhaps he'll contest the will."

"I don't think so," Marna said thoughtfully, "he's so fine about money. He never let the old man talk about it. He always wanted him to feel that he loved him for himself alone, not at all for the money."

"Marna, why don't you go to see Ralph? You love him. There is no use your denying it, my dear, it's written all over your face now as you blush! But if the mother and daughter forged a new will, then certainly Ralph Grant ought not to marry the girl, and he ought to be told it."

"You don't know what passed between us, Miss Craig. I couldn't! I just couldn't!" the girl fluttered.

"Well, if you really like the chap, and want to see justice done—"

"I do," Marna confessed, lowering her eyes.

"Then take the afternoon off and go!"

AT three o'clock Marna sent her name into his office through his secretary, and wondered whether she really had any proof that the will was false. As she waited, the door opened suddenly and Mrs. Leighton and Cora came in. Marna's heart sank to her boots and she turned to the window so that the women would not see her, but Mrs. Leighton's sharp, nervous eyes immediately recognized her. She came forward.

"What are you doing in my nephew's office?" she asked sharply.

"I came to see him," Marna said bravely.

"About what?"

"I prefer to tell him."

"Young woman, this is my business, and unless you tell me what you want I shall have you shown out."

"Oh, really. You inherited this business, I suppose," Marna said pointedly. Her Irish blood was boiling. She could have withstood blows at this moment.

Mrs. Leighton paled.

"That is none of your business,"

Cora snapped.

"If you're here contemplating gossip or blackmail," the mother recovered herself and spoke now in a harsh voice, "you'd better get it out of your mind. You little nurses who prey on the men you nurse!" she said sarcastically. But plainly she was nervous.

"If what I had to say concerned you, I'd discuss it with you. I am here to tell Mr. Grant what I heard his uncle say."

"If you dare"—Mrs. Leighton completely lost control of herself—"I'll kill you!"

"Ah, then you admit you forged the will," cried Marna, "otherwise why would you threaten me?"

"Mamma, don't pay any attention to her, she's crazy," Cora cried.

Mrs. Leighton regained her composure somewhat.

"I don't know what you're talking about, young woman, but I'll tell my nephew that you're a bad woman. Every one knows nurses are bad women!"

"Oh, do they?" retorted Marna, stung to the quick. "For that I could sue you for defamation of character—but I won't bother. I'll merely tell Mr. Grant that I heard his uncle say he was leaving him his fortune, and you and your daughter were only to receive ten thousand dollars as gifts."

"Why, that's ridiculous," Cora said, forcing a laugh.

"My dear," the mother said, "you are very much mistaken. Mr. Grant made a later will. But I don't want a fuss. I'm willing to make you a little present to forget about the first will."

Marna was trembling like a leaf. "Do you think I'll take a bribe? And, besides, how could he make another will when he lost consciousness right afterward?"

"You *are* an adventuress!" Mrs. Leighton cried furiously. "I shall certainly have you arrested for blackmail."

"You'll have a hard time proving it," a quiet voice announced from the doorway.

THE three women turned swiftly to the door. Standing there with a grim face was Ralph.

Marna came toward him. The other two were rooted to the spot.

"I've heard every word," he said in the same calm, ominous voice. "As soon as my secretary said Marna, Miss Kerry, was here, I came out. Eda Leighton, there is nothing you can say. I was suspicious, I don't mind confessing, at my uncle's disinheriting me in favor of you, but I loved Cora too much even to permit the thought to lodge in my mind. But Marna—I mean Miss Kerry, has proved your guilt more ably than could a lawyer. I shall take the matter immediately into court and a hunt will be made for the proper will.

"No wonder Cora put off marrying me. I see it now," he said bitterly, "it was my uncle's hope to see us married before he died, but you put it off, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you mean," Cora cried, but her voice trembled.

"Now I know," he blazed on relentlessly. "You were waiting to get the

money and then get rid of me. Well, Mrs. Leighton and Cora, it is your turn to go. I am calling on my uncle's first lawyer at once, and we'll have no trouble proving that this second will is a forgery!"

He held out his hand to Marna.

"Will you come into my private office, Marna—I mean, Miss Kerry?" He ignored the other two women who were too nervous and overcome to speak. "The street door is on your right," he told them.

"You'll never prove it!" Mrs. Leighton was crying hoarsely as Cora pulled her out.

"Better come, mamma," she said bitterly, "it looks like the game's up. We'd better not say anything until we consult Benjamin."

RALPH and Marna stood alone in the deserted office. Marna was too confused to speak. She stood uncertainly plucking at her glove.

"I—I hope you're not angry," she said in a low voice, as he continued silently staring at her flushed face.

"Angry?" he said in amazement. "Marna Kerry, you are beautiful, and as good and fine as you are lovely. Angry?" he repeated. "Why, you've done everything for me! Without you I should have been cheated out of what

is rightfully mine, and would have married—"

Here he bit his lip, scarcely able to go on. "I might have married a woman whose soul is as black as hell."

"I'm so sorry," whispered Marna.

"All my feeling for her is gone," he said in an awed voice. "I see it all now so clearly. She never really wanted me—only the money! Marna, Marna Kerry, lovely Marna, how can I prove to you that it is you I love? I loved you the moment I laid my eyes on you that day in the hall.

"But I suppose you hate me," he continued bitterly, "and yet I couldn't help taking you in my arms that day in the hospital. It was an impulse I couldn't stifle to save my soul. Marna, how can I show you that my love for you is as great as it is full of respect?" he asked earnestly.

"By kissing me, I guess," Marna whispered, her lips twitching.

"Marna!" he cried, and suddenly she was in his arms, atune to his kisses, throbbing with an overwhelming tenderness.

"Marna, I've waited for you all my life," he whispered as he pressed her to him.

"And I've waited for you," she said simply.

Their lips met.

Currents

ALWAYS love is like running water,
Always like a rill in the spring.
What should we ask of life but laughter,
What of love but to hear it sing?

Always love is a quiet flowing.
(Listen with eyes shut, listen at ease!)
Its speech is as endless water going
An endless journey under still trees.

—Elizabeth Bohm



Kathie wanted to scratch his eyes out. How dare he say the same things to Daphne he had just said to her?

A Cottage for Two

Kathie didn't want to marry. Especially she didn't want to marry Duke, who was all she most detested!

By Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith

KATHIE had heard all about Duke Reynolds before ever she saw him. He and Buddy Morris were selling bonds for the same New York firm and shared an apartment down in the Village. Buddy was home for his vacation, and for one whole week he bored Kathie to death, raving about Duke. Buddy lived next door, and he and Kathie were allies, and always had been—perhaps because

Buddy was not sentimental and never had tried to make love to her.

"I don't know how he does it," Buddy confided to her again and again, "and neither does he. But how the gals do fall for that boy is a crime! It's just a gift, I guess. Even the boss's daughter last winter took to hanging around the office at all hours trying to catch Duke at his desk. She was a swell girl, society deb, Park Avenue

address, and all the cash on earth. Most fellows would have fallen all over themselves trying to nab her, but not Duke! He likes 'em all till they begin to get mushy, and then he can't stand 'em.

"He turned her down cold for a little artist in the Village, and then she had to go and get serious on him and he quit her for a blond actress in the Roaring Forties. How he does like to kid 'em along, then drop 'em flat!"

"I think he must be perfectly horrid!" flared Kathie indignantly. "Just a cheap, common flirt!"

Buddy rolled on the grass with laughter.

"This from you!" he gasped when finally he could speak. "Oh, me, oh, my!"

The color in Kathie's dimpled cheeks deepened a trifle.

"Are you insinuating I'm the same kind?" she demanded icily.

Buddy sat up and wiped his eyes.

"Oh, no, oh, dear, no," he declared with elaborate sarcasm. "You're as constant as the sunflower. A man always knows where he is with you—because he's always out of luck! You! Why," he turned suddenly serious, "you know very well, Kathie West, you'd flirt with Coolidge if you had a chance."

"I would not!" declared Kathie indignantly, but she looked guilty. "I'm nice to every one, and it's not my fault if I can't lose my head and go cuckoo over every man that wants me to. I'm just not built that way."

"That's exactly what Duke says," explained Buddy. "He swears he likes a large time, plenty of fun, and all that and he can't help it if every dame he meets goes and spoils it all by falling in love when he's not even thinking of such a thing. It bores him to death

when they get to the point where they want to sneak off from the crowd with him and moon around and hint about a little cottage for two, and so forth. He doesn't mean to marry for ages yet, if ever."

"Neither do I!" Kathie's pretty red lips set in a hard line. "And I wish every fellow I meet would quit pestering me to death about it."

Buddy grinned.

"Well, you're going to meet one this afternoon who won't bore you to death with a proposal, I guarantee that," he boasted.

For Duke was coming down to spend the last week of his vacation with Buddy.

"Oh, I wouldn't be too sure," Kathie tossed her brown-red curls. Somehow, the more she heard of Duke Reynolds the less she liked him. He must be a conceited prig. "The bigger they come the harder they fall—sometimes."

Much as she complained of fatuous young men who took one glance at her little piquant, heart-shaped face and fell headlong, it ruffled Kathie a little to think Buddy was so sure this egotistical upstart of a Duke Reynolds would be impervious to charms which had worked wholesale havoc up to now.

"Even Achilles had a weakness, you know," she reminded Buddy tartly. "I suspect every man has, including your heartbreaking friend from New York."

Buddy laughed provokingly.

"Take a little of that advice yourself," he warned. "Just because you've been able to give every man you've ever seen the gate is no reason to believe there isn't one on earth who can make you eat dirt. And, remember, Kathie, if you do fall for Duke don't get mushy. He hates it. You might

have a chance with him if you never let him know he'd made a hit with you."

Kathie was breathless with anger.

"Don't worry," her violet eyes went quite black with scorn. "I'll not fall, and I've never been mushy in my life and never will be."

"Great pride goeth before a great fall," quoted Buddy wickedly.

BUT Kathie had disappeared through the wicket gate which joined the Morris tennis court to the sunken garden on Kathie's side of the tall privet hedge separating the two estates.

Up in her own blue-hung bedroom, with its five big windows and bright flowered chintzes, Kathie flung her hat in one direction and her tennis racket in the other, and, still fuming over Buddy's exasperating cocksureness where his pal was concerned, studied herself in the tall mirror suspended over her dressing table.

Without being exactly conceited, Kathie knew she was easy to look at. A lot of men had told her so, and her own eyes confirmed it. She was not too tall, but she wasn't short, and she wasn't thin, though her worst enemy couldn't call her fat. She was just right—as somebody was always whispering in her ear.

Her hair curled all over her head in little ringlets that had a way of tangling up the sunbeams—and a man's heart. Her skin was delectable, clear and pink and white, with a few engaging freckles. She had a very kissable mouth and long black lashes that made her eyes look darker; and the way she wore her clothes was the despair of her rivals, for Kathie had the gift of chic to the nth degree.

Nevertheless, there were plenty of girls around as pretty as she, and a

few prettier. Kathie knew it wasn't her looks that made her the most run-after girl in town. Nor was it the fact that she could dance better than most professionals and wield a mean tennis racket.

Kathie was clever enough to have analyzed the situation exactly. She attracted men because she was so indifferent to them all. The fact that not one had ever been able to make her pulses quicken a beat was a challenge and an exasperation to the others. That Kathie laughed at the stronger sex made her conquest all the more desirable. Every new fellow who came along just had to try his luck with her, because the rest had failed.

Kathie grinned!

"And I'll miss my guess if Mr. Duke Reynolds doesn't get bit with the same bug! And if he does, oh, boy! Won't I put him in his place, and how!"

Her good-humor completely restored at the prospect of taking Buddy's sheik down a peg or two, Kathie hummed to herself as she did her nails and brushed her rebellious curls till they gleamed. Part of her charm, as Kathie knew well, lay in the fact that she was always as immaculately groomed as a prize winning kitten at a cat show. This afternoon she was more painstaking even than usual. She meant to show Mr. Duke Reynolds that a small town girl can look quite as up to the minute as an heiress from Park Avenue—or a blond actress for that matter.

Her crisp, pale green organdy had a tiny coat and a scalloped skirt with appliqués of ecru lace to match her slim ivory pumps and gossamer hose. The ensemble satisfied even Kathie's critical senses.

As she went slowly down the stairs.

she was perfectly aware that she looked as fresh and alluring as the first spring daffodil on a winter's day.

BUDDY had brought his guest over for tea, coming in as usual through the long French windows which opened onto the terrace. Kathie heard them laughing and making themselves at home, and her chin elevated a trifle. She wondered if Mr. Duke Reynolds would feel quite so sure of himself after the next hour. She thought not. In fact, she would have wagered all that was left of her month's allowance that that young man was facing the jolt of his life.

Buddy spied her.

"Oh, there you are, Kathie!" He was draped over the divan, leisurely helping himself to the fruit juices and sugared cookies which stood on the small tea table. "We'd about given you up, but I told Duke you were just putting on extra war paint for his benefit! And," he grinned affectionately at the tall young man who had risen at Kathie's entrance, "he was just conceited enough to believe it. Kathie, this lacquer-haired lounge lizard is Duke Reynolds. Duke, meet the girl friend, everybody's girl friend and nobody's sweetheart."

Kathie felt herself coloring with annoyance.

From all she had heard, Duke Reynolds was egotistical enough to believe she *had* dressed in her finest for his benefit. While this was the truth, it was by no means the impression Kathie had desired to make. But she concealed her chagrin.

"How do you do?" she murmured sweetly, sizing him up carefully from under her long lashes.

He wasn't extraordinarily good-looking, she decided, though he was

built well, tall, broad shouldered, long-limbed and lean-waisted. He should be able to smash a golf ball. He had freshly colored skin, black hair that was as well trained as a movie idol's, and a pair of laughing, rather insolent gray eyes. His nose was straight and his mouth—

She had to acknowledge his mouth was sort of enticing; rather large, with a wistful curve to the lips. Of course it was his mouth girls fell in love with. It *was* lovable, and his teeth were very white and even. Well, she'd not let that mouth make a fool of her as it had the others. She was forewarned and forearmed, and, anyway, she wasn't the type to lose her head over any man.

"How do you do?" he echoed in a lazy drawl, and she realized that he was sizing her up quite as cautiously as she had him.

"Well, did I falsify or didn't I?" chortled Buddy. "Isn't Kathie about as nifty a little peach as you've seen in many a day, Duke?"

"You didn't tell the half of it," drawled his friend gallantly. "Buddy, you've been holding out on me. No wonder you tried to keep me from coming down here this summer."

KATHIE bit her lip. So he was starting in right off the bat, was he? He meant to lose no time turning her head. Well, that was a game at which two could play, and, thank heaven, it was as old a game to her as to him.

"Buddy has told me a lot about you, too," she let him have her most provocative glance.

He colored.

"I'll bet he has." He shot Buddy a reproachful glance. "Now I'll have a handicap to work against."

"Oh, no," Kathie was deliberately

coy, "he told me only the nicest things, really."

And she made her eyes downright caressing.

"Honestly?"

She nodded. He promptly appropriated a place beside her on the divan.

"Then we ought to get along famously. That is," he grinned at her, "if Buddy's done his work well, you ought to be all set to like me."

"Oh, I am," cooed Kathie maliciously, "thanks to Buddy."

He moved a little nearer.

"I don't need any one to make me like you," he said softly. "I seem to be getting away to a good start at that on my own."

How gracefully he did it, Kathie raged to herself; and was he really conceited enough to think he could sweep her off her feet with as old a line as that? But she was careful not to betray her scorn. Let him think he was getting by with it, then the jolt would be all the severer when he learned he hadn't deceived her for a minute.

"Thank you," she murmured, exactly as if she were flattered to death.

"I know you've heard it till you're tired," he went on with a languishing glance, "but anyway you have the most devastating eyes."

Kathie managed to blush and look prettily confused.

"You shouldn't say such things on such short acquaintance."

He caught the cue exactly as she had expected him to.

"How long do I have to know you before I can tell you just how adorable that dimple in your cheek is, to say nothing of the little three-cornered one beside your mouth?"

Kathie laughed demurely.

"Oh, a long, long time," she whis-

pered, letting her lashes tangle against her cheek. "But of course," she added wickedly, "not too long."

"To-night?" he cried eagerly.

"I'll be seeing you to-night," she replied evasively. "We're all going to a dance at the club."

"And you're going to give me a lot of dances?"

"Maybe."

"Every second one?"

"Of course not."

"Every third one?"

"No, I—really—I couldn't."

"Every fourth then, I won't stand for less," he announced firmly.

And she let it go at that.

Shortly afterward Buddy began to grumble that he was being neglected, and in a little while they left, Duke making an occasion to press her hand and murmur warmly, "Every fourth dance, remember?"

KATHIE was not apt to forget. In fact she went rather grimly about the business of getting ready, sacrificing the new evening gown she had been saving for a more important occasion on the grounds that suddenly it had become the most important thing in the world to her for Mr. Duke Reynolds to be put in his place.

It was a fascinating frock—beige lace with long sweeping effects that made Kathie look tall and willowy. Wispy beige hose and slim high-heeled gold pumps with enormous jeweled buckles and a huge tortoise-blue feather fan completed the costume.

Kathie surveyed the general effect with complete satisfaction before she wrapped her blue chiffon velvet coat about her. Never had she looked more devastating, she was sure. Mr. Duke Reynolds had better watch his step.

She was out for game, and nothing but his scalp would content her.

He and Buddy were escorting her to the dance in Buddy's sport roadster. Kathie found them in the drawing-room when she came down, Duke looking handsomer in his Tuxedo than he had any right to look. He was just the type, she acknowledged resentfully, to wear evening clothes well. Much as she hated to admit it, there was something about him!

She took a firmer grip on herself. She had met good-looking men before. There was nothing about this one to get her goat. Of course there wasn't. But her heart gave a curious little jump when she met his gray eyes.

"Well, hello, Beautiful," he drawled. "Which fashion plate did you step out of?"

She knew he didn't mean it, it was just his line, and was furious with herself because all at once she wished he did mean it.

"Isn't she a wow!" ejaculated Buddy. "I tell you, our Kathie can out-glorify Gloria Swanson when she's a mind to."

"And how!" breathed Duke Reynolds softly.

If he had been any other man in the world, Kathie would have been sure he was smitten with her. His eyes quite plainly advertised the fact. But, thanks to Buddy, she was on her guard.

"I'm glad you like me," she said demurely.

"Like you? Say!" Duke laughed rather harshly. "I guess you know—" he broke off abruptly. "Come on, Buddy, what's the hitch? On to the dance!"

It was a sweet night, a little cool for June, but star-lit and with a little gypsy wind that breathed of honeysuckle. Kathie, cuddled down between her two

escorts, thought she had never known a lovelier night. For some reason even the moon had taken on a new glory. It was good to be alive. Her shoulder touched Duke's on her right. Evidently he was happy too, for he kept singing in his lazy drawl:

I could show the world how to smile,
I could be gay all the while,
I could change the gray skies to blue,
If I had you.

Kathie's heart fluttered unreasonably. Was he singing to her? Of course he was; she could feel his gray eyes intent on her averted face. He was making love to her right under Buddy's nose! She was outrageously thrilled and acutely conscious of Duke's nearness until suddenly she remembered that he didn't mean a word of it. He made love to every girl he saw until she began to reciprocate, then he lost interest.

Kathie bit her lip. She'd have to watch her step. He had almost taken her in. She began to suspect that this was a very dangerous young man, and one who might deal a wound instead of suffering one, as she had planned.

The first time they danced together she *knew* he was dangerous.

NO one else had ever been able to make her heart beat a bit faster, but the moment Duke Reynolds slipped his arm about her, Kathie's pulses began to behave atrociously.

She was furious with him and with herself, and yet happier than she had ever been in her life. Her whole body seemed to have come gloriously alive at his touch. It was heaven to dance with him—heaven and hell because—she stole a glance at him—evidently it mattered very little to him. If he felt anything like the wild excite-

ment surging through her veins, he gave no sign.

Kathie ground her teeth.

She regretted having promised him every fourth dance, and yet she caught herself counting the minutes till it was their turn again. It was at once the most thrilling and the most exasperating evening she had ever spent. For the first time she became intimately acquainted with jealousy. It had never mattered before, but now she suffered agonies every time Duke danced with any one else.

Never had Myra Leigh and Daphne Gordon looked lovelier, Myra a stunning blonde in pale yellow, Daphne a cuddly little brunette in red. Kathie had taken their beaux away from each of them all her life, but to-night she paid for every heartache she had ever caused them because Duke was splitting the dances he didn't have with Kathie between the other two.

Once, dancing quite near him, Kathie heard him drawling to Myra, "Where have they been keeping you all my life, Gorgeous?"

Kathie could have scratched out his eyes. How dared he say the same things to everybody and get by with it? Myra was just idiot enough to think he meant every word of it.

Kathie's eyes smarted with angry tears—she who had so often boasted the man didn't live who could make her cry! Thank heaven, she tried to console herself, she was not fool enough to be deceived by those caressing gray eyes and that wistful, lovable mouth.

Yet when Duke hurried up for their next dance and swept her out upon the floor with a "Thank the Lord, it's been at least a year since we danced, Beautiful," she had to hold onto herself with all her might. He doesn't

mean it, it's just his line, she kept repeating, trying to steady her heart, which was jumping about like a toy balloon in a high wind.

To save her life she could utter not one word of all the flippant things she had meant to say. She didn't feel flippant or even flirtatious. She felt—her lip curled—"mushy." There was no use trying to deceive herself. She just wanted to go on dancing with Duke forever, his arms about her, his musical drawl caressing her ears. How Buddy would jeer if he knew! Her teeth closed on her lip. But he mustn't know. No one must know, above all not Duke Reynolds, who hated girls when they got sentimental about him.

"Gee," he sighed when the music ended, "that was a little bit of all right, wasn't it, Precious? How do you keep out of the Follies when you can dance like that?"

KATHIE wanted to scream. Of all exquisite tortures what could be more fiendish than to hear a man say the very things you longed to hear him say and yet know he didn't mean it?

"You're not so bad yourself," she managed to come back, and wondered her smile didn't fly all to pieces. It was so forced.

He grinned.

"You believe in using a heavy hand on the flattery, don't you?"

She drew a breath of relief. So he didn't suspect the bitter truth—that, for the first time in her life she was on the point of becoming appallingly serious about a man.

"You set me a good example," she remarked demurely.

"I never flatter," he said solemnly. "At least," he colored, "I haven't been flattering you."

She laughed.

"Don't you believe the nice things I've said to you?" he accused her.

She shook her head.

"Nary a one of them."

"Then you've just been kidding me along?" he demanded.

"Perhaps."

He was going to say something else, but Johnny Dugan, who was Kathie's latest conquest, came hurrying up to claim her, and the next minute Duke was dancing with Daphne and bending on her exactly the same tender smile he had bestowed on Kathie the dance before.

Kathie was totally unprepared for the stab in the heart which his fickleness produced.

One minute she was floating on air in Duke's arms, the next she was burning with rage because he was dancing with Myra or Daphne.

It was a relief when they were all set to go home. At least in the roadster she'd have no tiresome rivals. She watched jealously while Duke said good night to the others; and it didn't help her feelings any when she heard him make a date with Daphne to go swimming in the morning and one with Myra to play golf in the afternoon.

Kathie actually shriveled. So that was how much of an impression she had made on him. He'd be here only a week, and already he was making engagements right and left with other girls.

Kathie's lip curled. He would pay for his insolence, she vowed.

"Well, we had a large time, didn't we, old boy?" gurgled Buddy on the way home. "Did I mention or did I not that we have some nifty dames down here?"

"You did!" admitted Duke. "And were you right? I'll say you were!"

"Myra and Daphne are lovely," put in Kathie demurely.

"Granted," Duke whispered in her ear, "but they can't hold a candle to you, and you know it."

For a minute Kathie almost persuaded herself that this time he was in earnest. Then she recollected.

"We're so glad you like us," she murmured flippantly.

"Yeah, a lot you *care*," his lip curled.

Kathie was desperately glad he didn't suspect how much she cared.

"On the contrary," she flashed him a wicked smile, "I want every one to like me."

"I'll say you do!" he laughed harshly.

And then they were home. Duke went to the door with her.

"Good night, Beautiful!" he whispered. "I'll be seeing you!"

And he was gone. Not a word about an engagement for to-morrow or the next day.

KATHIE could easily believe it. Usually every man she met tried to date her up solid for as long as he was going to be in town. Her cheeks were hot as she mounted the stair, and there was a pain in her heart, a little gnawing exasperating pain, that kept her awake half the night.

Not a thing did she see of Buddy and his friend the next morning, though she dressed carefully in a little blue checked organdy and sat around till noon hoping they would drop in. Evidently they stayed at Daphne's for luncheon, for it was well after two before Kathie saw Buddy's roadster dash madly up next door, and in twenty minutes Duke was off again alone for his round of golf with Myra.

Kathie bit her lip, but still it trembled. Never had she felt so humbled, so utterly neglected. She wanted to halloo to Buddy to come over—at least they could talk about Duke—but she conquered the temptation. Buddy was no fool. He would be sure to see through her tactics.

Johnny Dugan telephoned and wanted to come over that evening. Almost Kathie lied and said she had another engagement, but caught herself in time. She was positive Duke meant to see her that night, but he had not said so. Her pretty mouth hardened. She'd be compelled to teach him that if he wanted a date

Kathie's pretty nose wrinkled disdainfully.

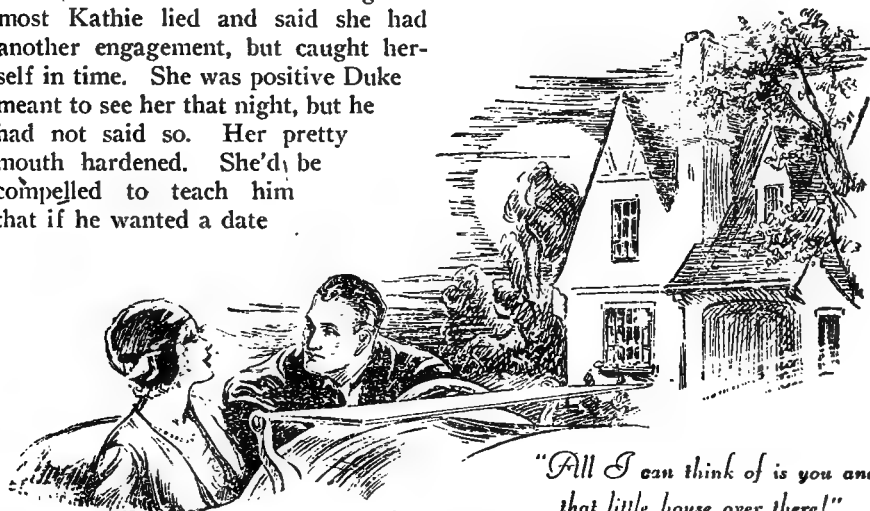
"He would," she remarked.

Buddy looked disconcerted.

"You know, I'm terribly disappointed."

"Yes? Why?"

"Well, I sort of hoped you two would hit it off together."



"All I can think of is you and that little house over there!"

with her he'd have to make his bid early.

And yet when she told Johnny he could come, she felt dreadfully let down. After all, Duke would be in town only four more nights.

BUDDY came over for tea. Kathie had hard work not letting him discover how glad she was to see him. But his visit provided little comfort. All he could talk about was what a hilarious time they had had at Daphne Gordon's swimming party that morning. Duke, it appeared, had never been in greater form.

"The old nut, he even flirted with Mrs. Gordon," chuckled Buddy.

Kathie bit her lip.

"And haven't we?"

Buddy squirmed uneasily.

"Well, not exactly, that is—" he hesitated.

"You mean, I haven't swept him off his feet?" her lip curled.

"Er—well—I thought he'd be pretty excited about you."

"But he isn't?"

Kathie felt the oddest pang.

"Er—well—he's raved about Myra and Daphne."

"And not about me?" Kathie's lips were stiff.

"Oh, he said you were a swell girl and all that, but—"

"He wasn't very enthusiastic, you

mean?" Kathie tried to sound indifferent, but it was hard work, because she was all quivery hurt inside.

"And you—you don't sound so strong for him either," accused Buddy.

Kathie drew a breath of relief.

"To tell the truth I'm not," she said calmly. "He's a little too obvious to interest me," her anger got the better of her. "Always saying the same things to everybody."

"Duke's all right," protested Buddy loyally. "He's always kidding the gals along, but he never goes too far. Just as soon as he sees there's any danger of somebody getting hurt he moves on. He may have wounded a lot of women's vanity, but he hasn't broken any hearts. And it isn't his fault if he can't lose his head over every girl who wants him to, now is it?"

"No," Kathie agreed miserably, "it really isn't."

"He believes in giving them all a whirl, the more the merrier," continued Buddy. "He met Leah Crandall at Daphne's and they're going over to Ravinia to-night to dance."

Kathie's hands clenched. So Duke had had no intention of seeing her that evening.

"How'd you like to go along with us?" suggested Buddy.

"Sorry," murmured Kathie, passionately grateful she had not kept her evening open for Duke. "I've a date with Johnny."

"Yeah? Then I'll ask Daphne. She'll be tickled to go. She's awfully pepped up about Duke. Why don't you and Dugan drive over and join the party? You know you don't want to sit around and talk to that sap all evening?"

"Oh, Johnny's not so bad."

"You've always claimed he bored you stiff."

Kathie grinned.

"He does, but then so does every one else," she said rudely.

Buddy sighed.

"I know; that's why I hoped you and Duke would give each other a kick. I'd have bet you two would have clicked. But I was wrong. I reckon you're too much alike."

"Probably," agreed Kathie.

THEN her heart gave an odd little jump. She heard Duke's voice outside.

"Where is everybody? Oh, there you are!" He came in through the French windows, his black hair ruffled by the wind, and Kathie was furious with herself, because she longed feverishly to smooth it down with her hands. "Well, what luck, old chap? Have you persuaded Miss West to go along with us to-night?"

Kathie's violet eyes glittered behind her long lashes. So he had thought she'd be willing to play second fiddle and trail along with Buddy after Duke himself had asked some one else!

"I'm sorry," she replied coolly, "but I made a date with Johnny Dugan this morning." She was determined Duke should know she had given Johnny the engagement before she learned that he had made other plans.

"And that's our hard luck," he said easily.

Kathie ground her teeth at his casualness.

"Just the same, you and Dugan could come over to Ravinia if you chose," complained Buddy. "I'll take Daphne and we could have no end of fun together, all of us. Please, Kathie."

Involuntarily Kathie glanced at Duke.

"Yes, do," he said politely, but without any special warmth.

Until then Kathie had fully intended joining the other party, but Duke's lack of enthusiasm was something she could not afford to ignore. She had never run after a man in her life, and certainly Duke Reynolds was the last man in the world to start pursuing. By his own confession nothing so bored him as over-eagerness on the part of a girl.

"Sorry, but I think Johnny has other plans." She pretended to stifle a yawn.

"Miss West has a right to spend her evening as she chooses. I'd," Duke smiled at Kathie politely, "looked forward to dancing with you—a lot. But," he shrugged his shoulders, "if you no can do, you can't, I guess."

Kathie could have strangled him cheerfully, but she managed to smile sweetly.

"You're so reasonable."

He had the grace to color.

"Thanks."

AND that was that. He was gone, and even yet he had not attempted to make a date with her. While Kathie, for the good of his soul, had condemned herself to a long poky evening with Johnny Dugan, Duke would be dancing with Leah and Daphne, and, no doubt, Myra would manage to be there. Kathie was sure Myra would not lose the chance of making a further impression on Duke.

Kathie's lips curled. Well, at least she had preserved her self-respect. No one could say she was running after Duke Reynolds!

But self-respect is lonesome company on a perfectly luscious June night, with the moon silvering the rose garden and a tiny breeze stirring the tall poplar trees.

Kathie, waiting on the side veranda

for Johnny, found the night curiously melancholy. Purposely she had selected the east side of the house, because she did not want to watch Duke and Buddy drive off without her. But she decided she had made an error, for the moonlight had a strange effect upon her, made her feel restless and miserable inside.

Kathie, swinging gently in the big porch swing, sighed and hummed under her breath:

"Mean to me, why must you be mean to me?"

Gee, honey, it seems to me

You love to see me crying."

That was exactly how she felt, lonesome, blue, and abused. But she certainly had no intention of broadcasting her sentiments.

She started violently when a lazy drawl completed the tune for her.

"It must be great fun to be mean to me, You shouldn't, for can't you see, How much you mean to me?"

Kathie whirled about. Duke stood there, smiling down at her.

"You!" her voice trembled slightly. "I thought you and Buddy had gone long ago."

"No, not for another half hour." He eyed her quizzically. "Am I invited to sit down?"

"Of course." She moved over hastily, her heart beating very fast.

"Joy, what a night!" he sighed under his breath.

"Yes, isn't it?"

She was bitterly resentful that he was leaving in half an hour.

"Do you know, I'm sort of figuring on staying down here permanently?" he announced. "Buddy's dad wants us to open up an office of our own here, and we're considering it."

She was slightly breathless.

“How nice! But wouldn’t you be bored—soon? After all,” she laughed, “there aren’t many girls here. At the rate you work, you’d have gone the rounds in about six weeks or less.”

“That’s true,” he grinned. “Still you seem to get by pretty well, and I understand you work right fast yourself.”

“All a mistake,” declared Kathie virtuously.

“So you wouldn’t advise me to settle down here?” he demanded.

“Are you the kind to settle down anywhere?”

He winced.

“Gee, you don’t like me for anything, do you?”

Kathie shrugged her shoulders.

“On the contrary, I find your antics really amusing.”

“Ouch! That was nasty. Well,” he grinned wryly, “even Babe Ruth doesn’t bat a thousand per cent.”

“Meaning I’m the one girl in a thousand who hasn’t fallen for you?” Kathie’s tone was scathing.

He flushed.

“Say, if I’d been as conceited as you think you’d have taken it out of me by now. Maybe,” he eyed her grimly, “that’s the idea?”

“On the contrary,” Kathie laughed, “why should I worry how conceited you are? You’re nothing to me.”

“I know.” He got slowly to his feet. “Well, good night.”

“Don’t go, oh, please don’t go!” Kathie longed to cry, but instead she merely called carelessly over her shoulder, “Nighty-night.”

AND then he was gone and there she was—a gorgeous night to waste on Johnny Dugan, who bored her to tears. She made him go home early.

But it was very late when Duke and Buddy came in, for she watched for them from the window upstairs. Even then she could not sleep: All sorts of disturbing thoughts troubled her as she tossed restlessly to and fro. Duke’s gray eyes that could be so caressing when he chose, his sleek black hair through which she longed to run her fingers, his slow lazy drawl which said the very things she wanted to hear.

Although he didn’t mean a word of it.

She was just getting up from the breakfast table the following morning when Buddy telephoned for her to come over and knock off a little tennis.

Kathie’s great heart gave a great leap. Evidently her disciplinary measures had produced some results. Apparently Duke was not meaning to ignore her as he had the day before. After all, he had dropped in awhile last night, even if he had had a date with Leah. Her pulses were beating very fast.

But when she reached the tennis court Duke was nowhere in sight.

“He challenged Myra to another round of golf this morning,” explained Buddy. “Gee, Kathie, you should have been along last night. We had a whoopee time.”

Kathie’s hands clenched on her racket until the wood cut into her fingers.

“That’s nice. Evidently I wasn’t missed.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that. I always miss you,” which wasn’t what Kathie had meant at all.

“Thanks,” she remarked dryly. “I’m glad my absence didn’t spoil the party for your boy friend.”

“Oh, Duke’s not the type to worry if one pretty girl fails to show up. He says there are always lots of others.”

Kathie received the ball with a vicious undercut that slammed it out of bounds.

"Really, Buddy, I'm a little fed up. Can't you talk about anything but Duke Reynolds?"

Buddy reddened.

"Sure I can."

And he proceeded to do so with such thoroughness that Kathie could have wrung his neck. She had simply bit off her nose to spite her face.

"I'm sorry," she apologized when the set was over. "I didn't mean to be cross, Buddy. Go on, talk about Duke all you like. I can stand it."

"Gee, it slays me that you don't like him, Kathie. Duke's a prince, really he is."

"Yes, yes, I admit it." Kathie's smile was a little wry.

"You know, dad and I had it all doped out for him to stay down here. He and I were going to open an office on our own. Duke inherited a bit of money, you know. He seemed real enthusiastic until to-day, but now," he shook his head, "he won't even talk about it."

Kathie pursed her lips.

"I'm sorry; it would be nice to have you home all the time, Buddy."

"Yeah, and it would be nice to have Duke too. He's loads of fun when you really know him, the best old scout in the world. I'm sure you'd like him better on longer acquaintance."

Kathie hoped not. She liked Duke Reynolds altogether too well now for her own peace of mind!

"By the way," interrupted Buddy, "you don't know it, but Duke and I are taking you and Daphne somewhere to dinner and to dance to-night."

"You mean Duke's taking Daphne and you're dragging me along to fill in," flared Kathie indignantly. "You're

right, I didn't know it, and I don't know it yet."

"Aw, now, Kathie, be a good sport. I know you haven't any other engagement. Even if you don't care for Duke, you can go along to oblige me, can't you?"

Kathie wanted desperately to go. She hadn't the least desire to put in another such evening as she had the night before, and yet it crucified her pride to have to accept such a casual invitation. She had punished herself to discipline Duke, and apparently that was all the good it did. He should by all rights have dated her up solid for the week the very night he met her, and yet he hadn't even asked her for an engagement. What can you do with a man like that?

For the first time in her life Kathie felt helpless.

"HERE'S Duke now," exclaimed Buddy eagerly. "Come on, old man, I need help. Kathie's trying to renege on our arrangements for to-night. You've got to help me persuade her."

Duke smiled.

"We'd like most awfully to have you." But he didn't say it as if it mattered so terribly.

Kathie shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, we'll call it a go, unless"—her indifference matched his—"something more interesting turns up."

"I love that!" flared Buddy. "What could be more interesting than a party with me and Duke?"

Kathie grinned.

"Who knows?" provokingly.

And then for fear Duke would think she was hanging around just for a chance to talk to him, she went home. Upstairs in her own room she frowned at herself in her mirror.

"Well, old dear, I never thought any man could make you play second fiddle just to be around him," she taunted herself.

Nevertheless she was wildly excited about the evening—even if it did sting a little when she learned Duke had gone swimming with Leah in the afternoon. Beggars cannot be choosers, she told herself bitterly.

Still her heart was singing as she dressed. At least to-night she'd not be stuck off with Johnny Dugan while Duke flirted with every other girl in town.

She wore a little blue chiffon with a full ruffled skirt and an adorable round neck. It was a wistful little frock, and Kathie chose it deliberately because that was the way she felt, sort of humble and meek. She stuck a pink rosebud in her hair—old-fashioned, but for once Kathie was not trying to look one jump ahead of next year's styles. Suddenly she wanted to look cuddly, she who had always mocked at the "yes" type of girl.

BUDDY and Duke picked her up first, of course, so as far as Daphne's house, at least, Kathie sat between them, exquisitely conscious of Duke's shoulder brushing hers. Never had she dreamed it could be so sweet just to drive on through the scented night, beside some one whose nearness spelled pure joy.

As usual Duke was singing under his breath:

I'll be loving you always,
Not for just an hour, not for just a day,
Not for just a year, but always.

Kathie's teeth closed on her lip. How dared he sing of constancy when he was fickleness itself? She could have screamed when she heard him

singing identically the same thing to Daphne after he had tucked her in beside him in the rumble seat, Daphne, who giggled and cuddled down beside him as if she took it all to heart.

Kathie's lip curled.

The inn where Buddy had ordered dinner was not crowded. They had an excellent dance floor and an orchestra almost to themselves, with wide-flung French doors open onto the rose-wreathed veranda where they had their table.

Buddy danced the first with Kathie, and evidently he had not the slightest idea how eagerly she was waiting for the next. She hoped desperately that no one guessed that her heart was going like the speedometer on a racing motor when Duke claimed her.

She said nothing. She couldn't. Neither did Duke for that matter. For once he seemed to have lost his gift for paying compliments he didn't mean. He held her very close, far closer than was necessary, but Kathie, who was usually rather prim about that sort of thing, did not object. It was heaven to be held tightly to Duke's heart. She wished the rest of the world could be blotted out and they could go dancing together forever.

BUT the music ended, and Kathie came back to reality with a jolt to find their party augmented. Myra and Leah and their escorts had blown in on the scene. Trust them to ferret out Duke's whereabouts. She felt a wicked little thrill when she saw him frown before he remembered to act delightfully surprised to welcome the others to their group.

Of course he had to dance with them. Leah had a guest along, a very pretty girl. He danced with her, too, and there was Daphne, so it was all of

an hour before he got round to Kathie again. And then, as luck would have it, Billy Benson asked her first. Kathie hoped her face did not betray her disappointment.

As she passed Duke he whispered: "The next?" And Kathie nodded. At last he had cared enough to go to a little trouble to secure her for himself. Surely he liked her a little.

Her heart began to sing.

Again they danced almost in silence. Kathie couldn't have spoken had her life depended on it, and Duke's line seemed completely to have deserted him. The music ended. Kathie choked back a sigh. Now she would have to wait another long hour to dance with him again.

Duke was looking oddly sheepish.

"Say, I — let's beat it away from this mob for—for a breath of air."

Now it was by no means a mob, only Myra and Violet and Leah and Daphne, but to Kathie, too, the place seemed terribly crowded. So she who had always put her foot down severely on any young man who reached the sentimental stage where he longed to sequester her in shadowy corners, went along meekly enough with Duke. Buddy's roadster was parked near the entrance.

"What say we ride a little?" There was an odd husky note in Duke's voice.

This was strictly contrary to all Kathie's principles. She meant to refuse indignantly, but she heard herself murmur: "All right," and that was that.

The wind fanned her flushed cheeks as she sat primly withdrawn in the farthest corner of the roadster's wide seat. Whatever had possessed her to come? Here she was rushing off with him the first time he asked her.

Where on earth was he going? She realized suddenly they had left the highway and turned into the attractive new suburb which was growing up around the country club. Honeymoon Place, people called it, because every newly married couple who could afford it was buying out that way. Cunning little bungalows, just made for brides and grooms.

Abruptly Duke halted the roadster. Opposite, bathed in the moonlight, stood a house, an adorable English cottage with a steep tiled roof and leaded windows, and flower boxes already planted so that they made gay spots of color against the cream stucco walls.

Something about the place went straight to Kathie's heart. She who had boasted she never meant to get married, suddenly actually pined for that little house.

What a home it would make for somebody. Only she wanted to make it a home for herself—and Duke.

There was no use evading the truth. She wanted that little house terribly—and Duke. But he loathed girls when they got mushy and began to moon around about a cottage for two.

She tried desperately to pull herself together.

"DO you like it?" asked Duke in a voice that was curiously different from his usual drawl—a voice that trembled.

"It's adorable," breathed Kathie.

"I think so too. That is," he colored painfully, "I think it'd be kind of nice for a fellow to come home from the office nights and find the lights lit and dinner ready, kind of sweet, I mean."

Sweet. Kathie was trembling. It would be sweet to wait in that little house for Duke to come home at night.

to meet him at the door with a kiss, to sit down to dinner—just they two.

She gulped suddenly. What was the use of dreaming dreams that never could come true?

"Hadn't we better go back?" she wanted to get away before she made a complete idiot of herself.

"I—I guess so. You're probably bored to death. I know you're not interested in mushy stuff."

"Neither are you," she accused him swiftly.

Still he did not start the motor.

"Sometimes people change overnight," he contended in an embarrassed voice.

Kathie was only too well aware of that fact. She had changed herself. But she had no intention of admitting the fact.

"So they say," she remarked flip-pantly. "I can't see why."

He shifted restlessly in his seat.

"I—I know you hate this sort of thing. Buddy warned me how you loathe a guy when he gets sappy. I—I've tried to keep away from you, Kathie, because I know you don't want to hear what I want to say, but—I"—he was very white, and he did not look at her—"gee, Kathie. I know you're all fed up with guys falling all over themselves about you. I tried not to, honestly, but I did in spite of myself."

"Did what, Duke?" Kathie's heart was whirling over and over.

"Fall for you, Kathie, and how!" he acknowledged bitterly. "Took one look and crashed all to pieces. Gee," he wiped his brow, "I didn't know it hurt like this to like some one who doesn't like you. I never dreamed it was like this. I was never sentimental in my life till this week, and now all I can think of is you—and that little house over there. I can't sleep nights

for wanting to buy it and settle down there for life with you, Kathie. Please don't laugh."

"Laugh!" Kathie was nearer a sob. "I never felt less like laughing in my life, I—why—Duke, I—I could go down on my knees and thank God you want to make a home in that little house—with me."

"Kathie! You don't mean—" He stared at her, his eyes catching fire at what he read in hers. "Kathie, would you—could you love me? Will you marry me?"

"If you want me," whispered Kathie humbly.

"Want you?" His arms went around her. "I'm about crazy with wanting you, Kathie!"

THEY did not go back to the inn after all. When a couple of hours later Buddy stormed indignantly up the veranda steps he found them close together, blissfully surveying the moonlit rose garden from Kathie's porch swing.

"Well, of all the nerve, what do you two mean running out on me like that?" he began, then paused abruptly.

He had suddenly realized that Kathie was cuddled in Duke's arms, her head nestled on his shoulder.

"Go away, big boy," drawled Duke. "Can't you see you're a crowd?"

"Why—why—" stuttered Buddy.

"Exactly," drawled Duke. "You're going to be best man at a wedding, and it won't be long now. Run on home and tell your father we're opening an office down here just as soon as Kathie and I get back from our honeymoon."

"Gee," exploded Buddy, "and you two never were going to get married."

"Except to each other," piped up Kathie.

Which settled that!



*Rodney
caught her arm
and pulled it back*

*Janet's dream hero did come back to the north
woods, but not to see*

The Girl He Forgot

By Dawn O'Day

ALL through the bitter cold, ice-locked winter Janet Fitzgerald had resolutely prepared her heart for spring.

Seeing the bare, brown trees swaying in the roaring north winds, she envisioned them bright and glossy green with young leaves. Seeing scarred

ground, ice-incrusted, she smelled the warm loam turning, the young flowers pushing upward toward the hot sun.

Feeling the snow under her boots crunching on the lake that was a smooth crystalline expanse of ice, she visualized the lithe canoes arrowing through the swirling waters.

Hearing the howls of wolves in the mountain forests in the terribly still and lonely nights, she tried to remember that soon people would be here—gay young boy and girl voices laughing, talking, singing, filling the air with merry sound.

Yes, spring would come, and rushing waters and fragrant flowers and singing birds and laughing people—and Rodney Ware!

Ah, when *he* came back, when his familiar figure would saunter nonchalantly down the main street, when his kindly eyes would smile to right and left, acknowledging greetings—ah, then, spring *would* be here.

All through the long, bitter winter evenings, when the day's work was done, she would devise ways of meeting him and greeting him.

She would plan little speeches to make, think of all the walks they would take, the talks they would have, the things they would do together. Ah, she had such sweet, sweet things to dream about!

Young Jacques Laneau would sit at the opposite side of the fireplace, and scowl, annoyed at her silence and the far-away veiled look in her eyes.

"Hey, snap out of it," he would snort roughly. "Here I am trying to tell you how I bagged that wolf, and there you sit, not even listening to me."

HE is such a boastful fellow, thought Janet wearily. Imagine listening to him when I can be dreaming of my Rodney! But listen she did, because Jacques was her big brother Jim's friend and they worked together down at the lumber mill.

Once, returning from Montreal, he had brought Janet a brightly-colored string of beads which she had not dared refuse. Ever since then, he had

come to her house for Sunday night suppers and she had let him escort her to all the village dances and church sociables.

In time, of course, they would marry. He had never actually proposed to her, but somehow, it had been taken for granted by everybody, including Janet.

"—And although that wolf was certainly one big, strong fellow, I got him. I'm not afraid of anything in the world!"

He puffed his chest out arrogantly and put one arm possessively about Janet.

"Don't touch me!" she screamed as though a blazing iron had been applied to her skin, and jumped up.

Jacques stared after her in wild-eyed amazement.

"You going crazy?" he managed at last.

"I—I'm tired. I worked too hard to-day—heavy washing. I—I'm going to sleep. Good night."

And she escaped quickly before Jacques blocked her way.

Alone, on her little, narrow cot, she could luxuriate in dreams, could be free of the day's drudgery, could live in the warmth of to-morrow.

"Rodney, Rodney, where are you, where are you?" she would call silently into the night.

NEVER once did it occur to her that he might not come back.

Only when the first summer visitors came and he was not among them, her heart fell, and suddenly filled painfully with panic.

After all, what had she to go by? Old Labelle had asked him if he enjoyed his stay in their part of the country.

"Sure," he had answered enthusi-

astically. "It's marvelous, beautiful. I was enchanted by the lakes and the rivers and the forests and the mountains. I'll come back next summer—just as early as I can make it."

She had taken that answer and hugged it to her heart like some gorgeous secret, and it had warmed her through the desolate bleak days of winter with its furious gales of sleet and snow.

"Silly," she scolded herself, "must he come the first week the road is opened again? He'll come, he'll come—some time soon. He said he would come."

A hundred times a day, no matter what work she was doing, she ran to the door or the window, and looked up the winding road to see if he might be coming.

Jacques glared at her with suspicion, sensing something wrong. Janet no longer listened to his tales of heroism with any pretense of interest. She refused to walk with him, to go canoeing, swimming with him. Always she said she was tired.

"Tired?" he echoed bitterly. "You are not too tired to walk, to swim. You work all day in the house, you cook and clean, and wash and mend—and the work does not tire you. But you are too tired even to sit with me. Tell me, Janet, is it of me you are tired?"

How she wished that she dared tell him, yes. But one glance at his scowling eyes and angry mouth and general air of suspicious fury, brought her coolly to her senses. If she said "yes" he might beat her with his fists—for his vanity would be outraged—worse yet, he might force her to marry him immediately and become a sullen brutish husband who would revenge himself upon her for every fancied slight.

"How can you think of such a thing, Jacques?" she murmured. "I am proud to be seen with you."

"We will be married in the fall," he said shortly, "as soon as these summer visitors get out. I hate them, anyway, with their airs and their fine clothes and their tennis and their big houses. They think we are made of wood. The only good thing about them is their money, and believe me, I am charging them plenty to take them up the mountain trails. I am making more money than any other guide."

With that, his self-esteem returned.

O H, Rodney, come quick, come quick, she prayed. There is not much time before the fall. She felt that if only he were here, there would be some way out of the vow with Jacques.

On certain days, waking from blissful dreams of him, Janet would sing and skip at her work, frolicsome as a kitten, her heart buoyant with hope and bright dreams. On other days she felt crushed under despair and the dark weight of frustration. The spring blossomed hotly into the summer, visitors came and went, new ones came—and he had not yet come!

Dutifully, she went to the dances with Jacques. Yes, now she danced. But after they were married, it would be her duty to sit home in dignified loneliness. What would her life be like? She would have one more to cook for, to wash for, to mend for, to listen to and obey. And she would have no love—and lost forever the chance of love!

Then one day as she was flying barefoot down the main street, her two long, black braids swinging behind her, her arms filled high with wood whittlings from the lumber yards, she ran

headlong into a man whose arms were full of books. In a moment, the whitings and books were scrambled on the dusty road, and the man was helping the girl up.

"Rodney!" she cried wildly, then seeing the astonished stare in his eyes, added weakly: "Ware."

"Now have I such a short memory, blamed fool that I am? Really, I must apologize a thousand times, but I cannot—"

"Of course not. I'm Janet Fitzgerald, the boatmaker's daughter—the post office keeper's niece. I—I saw you around last year. Funny that I should remember you. One sees so many people around."

Oh, what was she saying! The words seemed to be coming out all wrong, and she couldn't keep her mouth shut, emotion was bubbling in her so.

HE was picking up the pieces of wood, so she began to pick up his books. Together, holding the other's possessions, they walked in silence down the street to her house. She opened the door and he came in. Rodney Ware in her house! Wasn't it amazing, thrilling, wonderful?

Then, entirely confused by her sudden happiness, and forgetting that it was his books she held in her arms and not her wood, she flung the top book into the open stove.

"Oh, what have I done?" she cried agonizedly, as she saw the pages flare up simultaneously.

She was about to plunge her arm into the blazing stove to rescue the book if possible when Rodney Ware caught her arm quickly and pulled it back.

His sudden action had jerked her sidewise, so that she fell against him. He put out his arms to catch her.

She lay in his arms, her eyes looking into his. Just so she had lain in his arms in her dreams. Was this true? Could this be true? Not really believing, scarcely daring to believe, her blood racing madly through her body as it did even in her dreams of him, she looked deeply into his eyes, and all her starved senses, all her bitter hunger of the heart cried out.

"Kiss me," she murmured, "darling Rodney, kiss me."

He was staring at her, saying nothing, doing nothing. She felt a blush run down her body like a caress. But it was too late. She had said those words, actually spoken them aloud!

Suddenly, he swooped down, and his arms tightened about her. He kissed her, and Janet felt that the world stood still. Her lips trembled under his lips.

"My dear!" he said tenderly.

He sensed instantly that this was no girl who flung light kisses to men. Something in him leaped in response to the youth and the warmth, the simplicity and sincerity of this child in his arms.

"I love you, Rodney," she told him, in a burst of eager affection. The words had been rehearsed so often in her heart that she could not keep them in. They flew impulsively past her lips.

She was shocked by the sound of her words. She tried to ease out of his arms. What had she said? He knew her but ten minutes—where had she got the brassiness to fling herself at him so? It was the courage of desperation, had she but known.

TEN minutes? But that was ridiculous. She must explain.

"Rodney," she spoke hurriedly, her words catching in her throbbing throat, "you must not misunder-

stand me. It's not just ten minutes, darling, every day and every night, for a year, I have loved you, I have dreamed of your coming and taking me into your arms like this and—and kissing me. Perhaps it seems sudden and bold—does it seem cheap of me—does it shock you? You see, Rod—may I call you Rodney?—it seems—very—natural to me.”

He patted her hair, smiling down at her from his great height.

“I understand, little girl. May I call you—”

“Janet is my name, Janet.”

“I know just how you feel, Janet. Because I'm in love, too.”

Now she felt that there was too much happiness in her heart. She felt it must break with the sheer weight of happiness it held. How beautiful all this was, how marvelous, how sweetly it had all happened.

Oh, how kind fate could be, how generous. He was in love, too! Then he must have come back—for her. Last year, he must have seen her—have seen her and fallen in love with her—just as she did with him. Oh, life was too good!

“When did you see me first? The very first time?” she insisted gayly, her eyes dancing brightly.

“Why, ten minutes ago.”

She looked puzzled.

“As I was telling you, my fiancée arrives to-morrow. She has never been out of cities or fairly citified country towns. And she is so curious to see life in the north woods here. I hope you will like each other.”

Her whole beautiful new world crashed about her ears. She felt numb as if fists were pummelling her cruelly. There was a strange man standing here before her, telling her terrible things—where had her Rodney gone?

“I—I hope so,” she managed to mumble.

Now her last chance was gone. She had met Rodney—only to lose him. His fiancée coming to-morrow. Like her? Why, she could drown her cheerfully.

He would marry another girl, and walk out of her life, leaving her to Jacques and all that life with him could mean, would mean.

And there was nothing she could do. She was now looking at a man who was looking at a girl whom he had met ten minutes ago and whom he had kissed by request. After all, she realized that this was a difficult and embarrassing situation for him—for he *had* kissed her—having a fiancée.

Well, any man can lose his head, especially when a young girl looks adoringly into his eyes and offers her lips as a bright challenge and even adds, “Kiss me.”

“Good-by,” said Janet, and ran quickly upstairs. When she returned, he was gone.

THE next day she was standing in the doorway of her house, with Jacques looming big and powerful at her side, and her younger brothers and sisters playing with their little friends on the wooden planks that constituted the front porch.

Looking up, she saw Rodney swinging down the road with a girl at his side.

The newcomer looked exquisite. Delicately turned out from head to foot. She was wearing a sports suit and high, shiny boots and a soft, crushed felt hat. The orange tie against her spotless white shirt looked like a challenging banner.

The kind of clothes New York's exclusive sports shops recommend for

summer north woods wear. Utterly impractical, but devastatingly flattering.

She was smiling faintly, pointing here and there with a little orange swagger stick, chatting pleasantly to Rodney who was jogging along beside her, his eyes seeming to devour her trim little person.

Janet looked down at her old printed cotton dress, tied with a piece of cord around the middle in lieu of a belt, at her bare feet. Jacques put his arm around her shoulder.

"Now there, that sort of thing, that's precisely what I mean. Of course, she must be a good deal older than she looks, but even so she's only a child. Imagine being married to a powerful man like that who probably doesn't lift anything heavier than a cigarette. She runs that house and those kids. What a house—it looks as though it were kept together with thumbtacks. Oh, and what a life! Just look at the clothes she's got on—it's enough to give you the heebie-jeebies. I'd rather die than live like that!"

She shuddered and passed on, the little swagger stick busily pointing here and there. Rodney's eyes had narrowed; pain had blazed in them, and momentary anger, too.

Janet cast her eyes down until the girl was well past. For the first time, she saw herself as others saw her. So that was how she seemed to his fiancée. Then—then that was how she must seem to Rodney, too!

HOW had she dared—how had she *dared* to tell him she loved him, to ask him to kiss her? He had been decent enough not to turn on his heel and leave her standing there asking. He had been noble enough to hope "they might like each other."

Why, they were worlds apart—what had people like Jacques and herself to do with people like Rodney and his fiancée?

No, no, Janet's heart cried out in contradiction, there *are* two people who don't belong in the picture, but those two are not you and Jacques, but Jacques and that girl!

She stood in her doorway as though turned to stone. What chance had she—why, Rodney had said "I hope you will like each other"—and yet, when they had passed, he had not even paused to introduce them.

Yes, she thought bitterly, she will like me and I will like her. Why, I hate her and she would not even admit that I am alive!

"The dogs, the dirty ones," Jacques was saying, "I will get even with them yet for this. Does she think we speak only French Canadian and do not understand her English that she dares to insult us so? It would not be wise to pick a quarrel with rich visitors like those—that Ware is very rich—but when my chance comes, I shall make him eat her words, gentleman that he is."

He spat the words, blazing with fury.

AND now they were returning from their walk, Rodney and his fiancée.

"Amusing, isn't it, how some people live? I have no doubt they are quite content, knowing of no better life."

Resolutely, Rodney stopped, removed his hat.

"I would like you to meet a friend of mine, Lenore. Janet Fitzgerald—my fiancée, Lenore Hastings."

"How do you do?" Lenore's voice was icy.

"I am very glad to—to meet you,"

said Janet. "My"—the word stuck in her throat, must she say it? She knew she must—"my fiancé, Jacques Laneau."

There, it was out. Now, she was, if possible, even less in Rodney's eyes. A girl, affianced to one man, begging a man who had just met her ten minutes ago, to kiss her!

"Miss Hastings is leaving in a few days," Rodney ran on, and



*Then suddenly
powerful arms
encircled her*

"Glad if I can amuse Miss Hastings," flashed Janet.

"Two little hens paddling along, eh?" laughed Lenore. "Or is it ducks that paddle? I'm no good at barnyard patter. But I'll drop over during the day. All right, Miss Fitzgerald?"

"All right."

Janet saw how thin a line his lips made, and how scornfully he returned Jacques's sullen glance. "Perhaps we could make a little party and go down by canoe through the waterways a bit."

"Might be amusing," Lenore shrugged her shoulders, "but water's not my element. And, Rod, I won't have you see me at a disadvantage."

"Well, why not go out with Miss Fitzgerald alone—if she is willing?"

Janet felt like laughing aloud. She had warmed herself all winter through dreams of Rodney this summer—and now she would politely paddle his fiancée about the lake. How ironic!

And next month she would get a new pair of shoes and a new white dress, and the priest would make her—Jacques's wife, forever and forever.

She ran indoors and flung herself upon her cot in a hysterical fit of weeping. In an instinctive flash, she knew

that nothing mattered but love—and that there was nothing more bitter in life than loving some one who did not love you.

THE morning hours passed with leaden feet. Janet listened always for the sharp little tap on the front door. Of course, that girl would not soil her knuckles, but would use the brightly painted swagger stick. Outside the sky was dark and heavy masses of swiftly rolling clouds were bunched in corners. Perhaps she wouldn't come after all.

Janet hoped somehow that the girl wouldn't come. Somebody else could show her the woods and the rivers.

She sulked by the window, seething with suppressed misery, her heart heavy with defeat. What a girl Lenore was! She could say quick, clever, meaningless things, she looked everywhere for things to be "amusing," she was soft, silken, pampered, cuddly and kittenish.

Janet looked at herself in the mirror and bit her lip in vexation. Tears stood in her eyes. There was a girl whom life treated lavishly. Rodney had said to her "Kiss me," had said to her "I love you." While Janet—

There was a sharp, commanding knock on the door.

"Come in. The door is never locked."

"Are you ready? Then let's be on our way."

"But the weather? It looks like storm. It's not very safe on the water—in fact, anywhere away from home at such a time."

"Afraid?" Just that one word, but the sneer in it lashed Janet.

Without another word, she led the way to the wharf, silently motioned Lenore into the swaying canoe, and

with face set, cold and hard, jumped in lightly and took up the paddle.

The water lapped about the sides of the canoe as if trying to get in. The current pulled swift and crisscross to the river's course. It was difficult guiding the frail craft. They were going at a fast clip, swung along by the angry force of the undertow.

It was stupid, Janet knew, to be out on the water on such a day. No man in his right senses would chance it.

But here they were, Lenore sitting daintily unconcerned, nonchalantly puffing upon a gold-tipped cigarette, while the fingers of her free hand trailed delicately through the water.

"I'm going to make for shore," said Janet curtly, "if I can."

"Can?" she echoed insolently. "You *must*. Do not forget you are responsible to Rodney Ware for me."

"He should not have let you out on such a day."

"He doesn't know I went. I should worry if he should worry about me." She hummed the last words as though it was a popular song.

JANET looked blank. Cold-blooded, spoiled little fool! Rodney was probably worrying himself to death right this minute.

She headed the canoe for shore. She worked furiously, making deep, powerful strokes, pulling on the paddle with all her strength. Slowly, very deliberately, the canoe spun in the water, inching toward shore.

"Here, now, what are you doing? You keep straight on. I want to go straight on."

"Yes, and go straight over the falls and get dashed to death on the rocks. Sit still, and maybe we'll get to shore."

"Do what I say, Janet! I'm giving orders."

There was that in her voice that stung Janet, who was painfully slicing through the water, her whole weight pressing on the paddle. Her "Janet" was not spoken in camaraderie, rather as one addresses a servant who is stubborn. Janet wheeled about.

"Shut up!" she snapped. "If I can't get this canoe to shore we're done for. Hear that roaring down below? That's the falls." Her eyes were narrow, there was power in every taut line of her body. "So—shut—up!"

Lenore stiffened. Her eyes dilated. Her hands fluttered.

"Is—is it—dangerous?"

"Is death dangerous?" said Janet quietly. "You fool!"

There was a sudden crash, and their canoe piled up against a rock whose top scarcely came to the top of the water. Janet clutched Lenore's hand with one hand, and with the other clawed on the rock until she found a fingerhold.

"Oo-h-h-h," wailed Lenore, her teeth chattering in fear.

"Shut up!" Janet snapped grimly again. "Stop howling. You've got to help me, and we'll get out."

THEY clung tightly to the rock over whose surface the waters rushed madly in wild haste. Down below came the ominous thunder of the falls crashing against the rocks.

The two girls looked at each other, silently, and in that moment truth flashed between them. Lenore knew that her companion loved Rodney.

"Give me your tie," Janet demanded.

Then she tied it to the rope that had encircled her waist, and with one free hand and her teeth, managed to make a noose of it.

"I'll get you out of this," she said. "because Rodney loves you—and I love Rodney." She gulped. "Perhaps—only one of us will reach shore—you must be that one."

Lenore could not speak. She pressed Janet's hand hard.

With a deft movement, Janet braced herself against the rock, working her knees under water against a jagged formation of the rock, and holding tightly to it. She gauged the distance toward a huge tree that grew at the very water's edge, and had one low hanging branch that pointed toward them in a languid arch.

She flung her lasso with precision.

Slowly, slowly, so that the branch would not crack under sudden pressure, she pulled on her rope, until the branch sagged lower and lower, and finally came to rest upon the top of the rock between Lenore and Janet.

"Now, climb out carefully—hug it with your knees and hands—don't slip—keep balanced—and you'll get to shore—and Rodney."

As she said his name, she looked up. There, standing on the ledge above the tree, was Rodney, staring wild-eyed at them!

SLOWLY, slowly, while Janet bore down with all her strength, feeling faint with the cold water beating on her and the jagged rock cutting her knees—Lenore crawled to safety.

She's safe, Janet thought wearily.

What do I really care if I ever get to shore again? What life will I save myself for?

I might just as well die. Even Lenore said she would die if she had to live the sort of life mine will become. Oh, what's the use?

As these thoughts were flashing

through her mind, Janet's hands were growing lax, her knees loosing their grip. A sudden rush of water swept over her, and flung her back. She did not try to fight.

"Janet! Oh, Janet!"

A cry tore in agony through the air. And simultaneously, it seemed, as the branch snapped back into its customary aloof arch let go by Janet's slipping fingers—a dark form dived into the swirling waters.

There was a fearful cry from Lenore. It startled Janet into the instinct to battle for that precious thing called life.

Strength seemed to flow back into her body. Her arms struck out. Painfully she plowed the water, and was elated to see that she was at least holding her own.

Then suddenly powerful arms encircled her, water-bright eyes looked hungrily into hers, and soon she felt herself being lifted.

"JANET, darling, I love you. Are you all right? I thought I'd die when I saw you slipping. I knew I had to let you know I loved you—then if death must come, we would go together."

Then came Lenore's voice:

"Rodney, isn't it foolish of you to mention death—when you are just beginning to live? Oh, you two'll have beautiful days together yet!"

Lenore was looking up at them smilingly from where she still lay upon the ground, exhausted and ignored.

The two young lovers, startled, turned. They had forgotten the other girl. Now her words had brought back reality. Janet felt Lenore was mocking them, and Rodney did not take his arms from Janet.

"I mean it," she insisted. "I re-

lease you, Rodney. I suppose it is rather late to mention it, but—but I married Dick Rogers the day before I came out here."

Janet stifled a cry that surged through her.

Rodney's eyes narrowed.

"Then how did you dare to come out here—as my fiancée—and torture me—and Janet? Because I thought I was honor bound to you."

"I—" Lenore flushed, and bit her lip. "I—I thought it would be amusing if we spent our honeymoon apart—especially if I came on to be your house guest. I thought it would give the crowd something to talk about." Her voice wavered. "I'm genuinely sorry—and really, you're beautifully suited to have each other. Janet so plucky—and you so brave, rescuing Commander Andrews and shooting that lion!"

"What lion?" Janet looked baffled.

"Don't tell me you haven't heard about it—why, the papers have been full of it!"

"But we never get any papers up here—except a Quebec weekly. Do you shoot lions, Rodney?"

"Only on Mondays and Thursdays, darling goose," he laughed. "Why, we make scientific expeditions to all parts of the world—the Gobi Desert, the Himalayas, Siberia, the Maya Temples, the Brazil jungles. I'm constantly traveling—it's marvelous, it's glorious adventure, and fascinating scientifically."

HE was so unassuming, so friendly, not like the boisterous, boasting Jacques who commanded with scowls and fists.

"I couldn't bear the thought of parting with you, Rod. Must you go to all those places?"

Had she won him only to lose him—if not to a woman, to science?

"Silly child," he chided her gently, "just try and get away from me from this minute on. Wouldn't you like to come along with me wherever I go?"

"Oh-h-h!" she breathed in ecstatic relief.

Suddenly, with savage strength, he caught her to him, and held her so, the thunder of their heartbeats mingling. He kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips.

"Darling, darling," he murmured, "you are so sweet. Remember that book of mine you threw into the stove? It was one I had written on my Asiatic

expedition. You see—I had to become a scientist and write that book—so that you could burn up that book and ask me to kiss you. I swear to you you'll never have to ask me again."

"Rodney, lots of things can happen in ten minutes."

She smiled up at him wisely.

"All the big things happen quick like that," he said, his heart in his eyes.

"It won't take more than five minutes for us to get married."

"But it will take me a minute or two to change into a dry gown," she pleaded.

"All right." He granted the minute with masculine generosity. "All you women take so long to dress!"

Won't You Fill This Out and Mail It To Us?

THE EDITORS,

ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,

280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

The Love Master

Her Happiest Christmas

Hearts In Hollywood.....

Humpty-Dumpty Girl

The Courage of Erin

A Cottage for Two

The Girl He Forgot

Lost Is Found.....

Twenty Minute Princess

Mad Marriage

My favorite authors are

Name

Address

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)



As she reached for the watch a wave of shame deluged her

Lost Is Found

*Two stray waifs in a big city find a lost jewel and
lose—something more precious still*

By Leonard Hess

WATER ran down the manes of the lions squatting stonily before the Public Library, and a gray sky seemed pressing upon a Fifth Avenue black with wet. It was a ghastly day on which to be out of a job.

"There's nothing to-day. Try us again in the season. No, we won't have anything next week. We've got all the girls we need."

Hettie's imagination heard these words over and over again. Hunger

pinched her—little, nipping hunger fingers. Her feet were wet and tired, and she felt that she could not drag herself to another millinery shop that day.

She would rather go back to her hall bedroom, even at the risk of meeting Mrs. Gates, who would sourly demand rent that was two weeks overdue.

It was four weeks since Mme. Louise had sent her away because business was slack. In the purse which

she held clutched between the shiny sleeve and the body of her worn blue suit-coat, there was one solitary dime. There was also, ironically, a bank book, but it was as good as waste paper, for in the past four weeks Hettie had used up her savings. In spite of her own predicament she had impetuously sent a hundred dollars to Aunt Hannah, who was sick up in Melville—just when Uncle John was hard pressed, too.

They didn't know, up at home, that she had lost her job.

She hadn't expected to be out of work so long. She dared not think of the morrow, or of Mrs. Gates. She looked about her almost wildly, as if something unexpected must come to her aid; but in that remorseless rain no one looked at her. Faces under sleek umbrellas bobbed grayly past her.

The timepiece in the bronze traffic tower told her it was five o'clock, and she began to debate with herself whether she should use her dime to buy a very meager evening meal, or for car fare. She lived in West One Hundred and Twenty-Seventh Street, and it was too much for her even to think of walking the distance.

Mechanically she went up the wide steps into the shelter of the library portals, and no less mechanically she wandered through the marble corridors. She wanted to keep her mind off her hunger—no small task, for her brain spun airily and her knees trembled. She had had a bun and a cup of coffee for lunch, and for breakfast she had finished the last of a few Uneda biscuits in her room.

Presently she found herself in the art gallery, where she gazed at the pictures without apprehending their meaning. There was a dark cloud in her brain, and the walls seemed a sense-

less splash of colors. The gallery was practically deserted. Hettie sat down on a bench before the large canvas of Turner's "Whale Ship," and let her eyelids close.

When she opened them, a man was progressing along the iron rail, studying the paintings at close range. Hettie thought that if she let her eyes follow a moving object, such as that man, she might steady herself. She must, she simply must become interested in something else than those cruel, pinching hunger fingers and the dismal prospect of to-morrow.

The man was now in a distant corner of the room. He was a tall man, who wore a gray, baggy raincoat and carried in his hand a misshapen, wet slouch hat. Hettie's gaze chanced to travel toward his feet; and then her eyes were magnetized by something that glittered on the floor almost at his toes. At the same time the man's look went downward, as if his eyes, too, had been drawn toward the shining object.

Hettie bounded from the bench. Something hard had come into her mind, into her heart—the pebble of sharp necessity. She was across the room in less time than it took the man to stoop, but in that time wild thoughts had torn madly across her brain. The thing on the floor was no more that man's than it was hers. Of course, she was not going to keep it; but there might be a reward offered for it. She would be entitled to the reward, for she had been the first to see the glittering object.

However, the man's hand shot down. Between his fingers Hettie, exasperated, saw a watch—a lady's wrist watch, very obviously of expensive make. There were jewels set in the wrist band.

"Oh!" Hettie cried. "That's mine, if you please!"

THE man looked quietly at her for some seconds. When he smiled, she knew that he did not believe her. For a moment she was furious; then a wave of shame deluged her.

"It *isn't* mine," she blurted out. "I don't know what made me say it was."

"Perhaps you're hard up," the man suggested.

Hettie was never more conscious than now of her poor clothes. What a fool she must have seemed, dressed as she was, to claim a watch like that! She could find no words, and tears started to her eyes. She pressed back a sob and turned away; but she retained before her a picture of the man's smile, which seemed derisive.

"Won't you wait a moment and talk to me?" she heard the stranger say.

She spun around and made her voice sharp.

"What is it? I said the watch isn't mine."

"I'm kind of hard up myself," the man said. "Why can't we go partners on this?"

"On what?" Hettie gasped.

The man looked toward the back of a guard who was patrolling another room of the gallery. Then he slipped his arm through Hettie's.

"Let's get out of here, anyway," he said. "The owner may have some idea where she dropped the thing."

"You mean—the watch?" Hettie asked with seeming irrelevance.

Out in the corridor the man nodded. For the first time Hettie took cognizance of his face. He was young, perhaps not quite thirty, and good-looking. His eyes were blue-gray; his chestnut hair had a slight curl to it. There was a faint stubble of beard shadow-

ing his cheeks. His clothes were negligent, his tie a bit awry in his soft collar.

"I could get to a pawnbroker's," he said, "and hock this thing. You look hungry, and I can tell you I am—terribly!"

Hettie shrank back from him. She was overwhelmed with horror by the idea he presented to her.

"No," she said, "I couldn't do that."

"Well," he said negligently, "whoever lost this watch"—he tapped the pocket into which he had slipped it—"can afford to lose it, I'm sure. Let it be on my conscience. It's been ages since I've invited a lady out to dinner."

Dinner! The word made Hettie feel weak with anticipation; but she would not give in.

"I meant to turn the watch in and claim the reward," she declared. "I would have looked in the 'Lost and Found'—"

"Well," the man said thoughtfully, "my hand got to the watch first. If there's a reward to claim, it's mine."

"Yes," she admitted, a small sob escaping her.

"But you're frightfully hungry. You're positively weak with hunger. Let's get what we can for the watch and have dinner."

Dinner! The word again! It conjured up images—platters of food, aromas of dishes well cooked. It was like a dream—one of those dreams of a sumptuous banquet spread before a starving man.

"Now look here," Hettie heard, "you can't hide it from me—you're all in. I know the symptoms, from observation of myself. If I happened to have some money in my pocket, it just wouldn't do for me to offer you some, or to offer to take you to a res-

taurant. I mean, it isn't done—not with a girl like you.”

Again for some seconds he looked steadily at her. In her small, pale face her eyes were large and dark.

“But the watch makes us partners in an adventure,” he went on. “Come along! First we’ve got to find a shop with three golden balls swinging over the door.”

Hettie felt her power of resistance failing. Dinner! The man took her arm, and they left the library by the Forty-Second Street exit, finding themselves out in the driving, bleak rain.

“If you’ve a dime,” said her companion, “which I haven’t, we’ll ride down town to a pawnbroker I know only too well. He’ll give me a better price for the watch.”

Hettie nodded. They splashed their way toward the L station.

“We really ought to call each other by some name,” the man suggested. “Let’s say that for this evening you are Jane Williams and I am James Smith.”

His bright voice made Hettie laugh. Her laugh sounded so unaccustomed in her own ears that the tears came again to her eyes, hung for a moment on the long, dark lashes, then mingled with the rain that ran down her pinched cheeks.

“All right, Mr. Smith,” she managed to say.

“**N**OW you wait for me here,” said James Smith to Jane Williams, stowing her in a hallway next to the entrance of the pawnshop. “I won’t be but a moment.”

Hettie, shivering, crouched in the shelter. The face of James Smith was very clear before her—a fine, open face, the face of an honest person. Suddenly she felt that she was doing a

dreadful thing—she was helping an honest person to become a thief.

She was sure that had it not been for her, her companion would not have pawned the watch, but would have taken steps to return it to its owner. True, he was hungry, but it was her hunger that had persuaded him to do this. She saw clearly the look of pity for her in his eyes. If she ran away, perhaps, before he came out of the shop, he might redeem the watch and act honestly about it; so she stepped out from the doorway, back into the rain.

The chill struck her hard, darted straight into her bones. She felt as if she were being whirled about. Everything before her grew blurred, and then dark with a terrible darkness. She seemed to have left the ground, but she knew she was sinking down. Then an arm supported her, just before she reached the wet pavement.

“Hold up, Jane! Just a moment, my dear! You poor kid! I’m calling a taxi.”

He almost had to lift her into the cab.

“You’d better get into dry clothes,” he told her, as they drove off. When she murmured that she lived too far uptown, he added: “Don’t worry about the fare. I drove a good bargain with uncle. We’re rich, for to-night.”

So they rode to the shabby rooming house where she lived, and James Smith waited patiently in the lower hall while she got into her “best”; for Smith had hinted at a good restaurant—“doing the evening up brown,” he called it.

And then they were seated in the good restaurant, having driven to its wide doors in a cab, having been helped from the conveyance by a doorman who escorted them under a striped

canopy, and having been bowed to by an unctuous head waiter who preceded them to a table set for two. As they walked across the polished floor, Hettie heard the water quashing in her comrade's shoes, and she was bitter with herself. She had been thoughtless. She should have insisted on him, too, going home and getting into dry things. He might catch his death of cold.

BUT Smith had picked up the menu, and seemed oblivious of physical discomfort. The waiter stood by to take the order, his pad poised. It was clear, from the man's curling lip and his air of boredom, that he resented these guests and wondered why the manager had ever allowed them to seat themselves among people who wore real clothes, not scarecrow attire.

As he continued to show signs of irritation, Smith looked up at him slowly.

"You're new here?" asked Hettie's companion.

The waiter, shocked by the sudden question and by something significant in the questioner's eyes, replied nervously:

"Yes, sir. I have been in the employ here but a week."

"Well, Alphonse—"

"My name is Pierre, sir."

"Well, Pierre, you are now living in a democracy, the president of which is not Paul Poret. On top of that, will you please bring two orders of cherry stones?"

The waiter walked off with amazement on his long face.

"Clams?" Hettie asked. "Oh, no! Really, I don't eat clams."

"My dear, you aren't looking at the menu, you're looking at the prices. You'll never satisfy your hunger that way. Of course, you eat clams. Just

think how often the owner of that watch—the ex-owner. I should say, or perhaps I should say the owner of the ex-watch—has eaten clams! And then you'll have some consommé—of course you will—to warm you up thoroughly. I think I'll order for you, until we reach the dessert, anyway. You're so famished, you poor thing, you simply can't read the card. Please place yourself gastronomically in my hands."

The truth was that Hettie could not read the menu, not because of her hunger and her swimming eyes, but because she had never eaten such things as were on this gilded list, such strange concoctions with French appellations. Moreover, she was frightened by the prices. Why, a single dish cost more, much more, than she had dared to spend for three meals a day, these past four weeks. It was terrible, the idea that they—she and he—yes, both of them—should be spending all that money, stolen money—yes, stolen money, that's what it was, money that belonged to some one else! And his honest face opposite her—what had she done to him? It was ghastly!

"Pierre, we shall now have our consommé. We are two starving people, my friend, so make it snappy." When Pierre had departed, Smith turned to Hettie. "What really is your name?" he inquired.

"Hettie Walton," she said.

"Well, I'm Theodore—commonly called Ted—Vanbridge. I'm a struggling artist. And you?"

SHE told him about herself. It was so good to speak it out to some one! She had come from Melville, up-State, to try New York—only Heaven knew why. In Melville she had lived with an uncle and aunt, but the farm didn't pay, and she wasn't go-

ing to sponge any longer on Uncle John and Aunt Hannah. She might have found a job in the country, as waitress in a hotel or helper in a dairy—or, for that matter, there were factories close to Melville where she might

into her eyes. He seemed to be studying every line of her features; but his gaze was so quiet, so unobtrusive, that she didn't mind. She liked him. She had never before met any one whom she liked nearly so well.



"You can't care
for me," she cried.
"we're strangers!"

"And now, Pierre,
two *filets mignons*,
with asparagus and
baked potatoes."

"Yes, sir."

"Can you see that
girl over there?" Van-
bridge asked Hettie.
"The one in the
mauve dress, I mean.
Beautiful line of

have worked. Of course, she had read about New York and had dreamed about it; but only Heaven knew why—yes, only Heaven knew why she had come to it.

"Only Heaven knows a lot of things," said Ted Vanbridge.

He looked steadily across the table

shoulder and neck, isn't it? Superb composition she makes, the way she sits there."

Hettie nodded. She could not speak, because suddenly her throat seemed constricted, choked.

"I—I don't want anything more to eat," she announced.

"What?"

"I—I've had enough, honestly. I never eat much."

"You're still worrying about the prices. You needn't. I got a lot of money for the watch—seventy-five dollars."

"That's just it," Hettie groaned.

"Just what?"

"I don't want you to spend any more of that money. It doesn't belong to you—to us. Please, I want to leave."

She half rose. The huge gilt mirrors, the Corinthian columns which supported the frescoed ceiling, seemed to overpower her. She felt crushed, miserable. Vanbridge leaned quickly across the table and caught her hand.

"Sit down," he said. "This isn't nice, really. You're my guest. You can't walk out on me!"

The pressure of his fingers induced her to fall back upon her chair; but she could not look at Vanbridge. She felt too guilty.

"Consider that you've had nothing to do with the affair of the watch," he argued. "It was my idea. You would have held it and merely claimed the reward. The pawnbroker was my notion. You're guiltless. Please look at me! You have the loveliest face I've ever seen."

He paused, for the waiter had come back.

"Now eat that delicious *filet mignon* and get some strength back into you," he said, when they had been served; but he saw that she could scarcely swallow.

"If it wasn't for me," she said presently, "you never would have done that."

"Done what?" he inquired, raising his eyebrows, though he understood.

"You'd have turned the watch in.

You did it for me. You had no money, and you thought I was hungry."

"So you were. So you still are."

"You never would have done it—not for yourself. It's too dreadful! I'm guilty, not you."

"I simply refuse," he asserted, "to allow this *filet mignon* to grow cold in the name of conscience! Let's discuss ethics, or whatever it is, afterward. You must not spoil this evening. It's like an Arabian Nights story—two poor, forlorn waifs brought together divinely in the big, heedless city by a trinket which a good jinni has thrown in their path. I have our plans for the evening all made. From here we go to the theater—"

"NO!" interrupted Hettie sharply. "Well, what do you want to do?"

"I want you to go back to the pawnbroker."

"He's closed by this time."

"Then go in the morning."

"And then?"

"Give him the rest of the money and tell him the truth."

"Come now! Do you want to get me arrested? By this time the police know about the watch. Pawnbrokers have to make a list of everything they take in, and hand it to the police at the end of each day. It's a crime to pawn a found article instead of trying to discover its owner. You see, what you suggest is impossible. The damage is done." He smiled at her. "But get it out of your head that I did this for you. Like most other people, I acted quite selfishly. I simply wanted an evening in your company."

"I've got to go, Mr. Vanbridge—please!"

"Ah, you don't want to remain in the company of a thief!"

She began to cry.

"I'm the thief!"

"No, really, you mustn't think so well of me. Even if you hadn't been there, I'd have done just what I did. You're crying because you're weak. I insist on your eating. Drag yourself through the meal, won't you? Do you really believe that you're at fault, that you did me a bad turn?"

"Yes. I tempted you—"

"Said the little girl from up-State," Vanbridge cut in, laughing heartily. "Well, then, if you did me a bad turn, you owe me something, and I have an idea how you can make it up to me."

"Well?"

"You have the kind of face I like to draw. Will you let me? In fact, I'm working on a picture now, and one of the figures needs a face just like yours. It would really be a tremendous favor. And look here, I don't expect to be poor all my life, and who knows but some day I'll be able to pay for a model? By George, I'm in a working mood right now! I'm crazy to make some sketches of you."

"If you really want to," she said in a low tone.

"You like me, don't you?"

"That's why this seems so terrible."

"I'm crazy about you. Suppose we don't go to the theater—would you come over to my place?"

SHE opened her eyes wide, as thoughts and doubts sped through her. She didn't know this man. How could she go to his place? A girl shouldn't do such things. He read all this in her gaze.

"Don't you think you could trust me?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered after a moment. "Yes, I trust you."

"Then let's finish our dinner—my

conscience hasn't robbed me of an appetite—and then we'll go on."

So they came to the specialty of the house—strawberries that had been soaked in brandy and snowed under a blanket of whipped cream. They drank their coffee.

"After all, what do you say to the theater," Vanbridge asked, "before we go up to my place?"

Only twice during her sojourn in New York had Hettie been to the theater, when some enterprising producer had distributed half-rate ticket coupons among the salesgirls at Mme. Louise's. She wanted to go with Vanbridge, but her conscience was still busily at work. The dinner, in a sense, had been a necessity, for she would have starved without it; but the theater—that was no necessity. That was an indulgence which they should not allow themselves on money obtained dishonestly.

"We can just about make it," said Vanbridge, looking up at the clock above the cashier's desk.

"I'd rather not," objected Hettie.

Again reading her thoughts, Vanbridge smiled.

"Then we'll go to my place," he said. "It suits me quite as well."

He left a lavish tip on the tray, and Pierre nearly struck the floor with his forehead as he bowed to this strange and shabby personage.

THE rain had stopped. The stars were shining.

"The weather smiles on our adventure," said Vanbridge. "The heavens do not weep for our iniquities. Let's take it as a good omen. I don't live very far from here, so if you don't object to walking—"

"Not at all," replied Hettie quickly.

There was a strange mingling of

emotions within her. She could not herself name her feelings toward her companion. She had never before gone anywhere with a strange man, but she tried to make the curious circumstances her excuse. She could almost feel fate pushing her on.

She got a vision of herself alone in her dismal hall bedroom. Indeed, since her arrival in New York, she had almost always been alone. She knew nobody. She had not made friends with the girls at Mme. Louise's. They weren't her kind. They talked about men, and they were crazy about clothes.

Now, however, she knew some one. Vanbridge's arm was again linked in hers, and she felt its pressure against her side. He was talking brightly about New York, about things she had never dreamed existed, and he was talking about other places, too—about Paris and London and Rome.

"You've been there?" she asked. "Really been there?"

"Oh, yes—in my better days."

She liked him—she knew that much—and she felt strangely close to him, held by the common bond of this extraordinary adventure. She felt as if hand in hand they had fallen from grace. Let him insist that the affair of the watch was entirely his doing, that even without her he would have done the same thing; but she knew better. She knew he wasn't that kind. As he had said, they were two poor creatures in an unfeeling city, and circumstances had pitched them together, perhaps to make them happy, even if only for an hour or two.

Vanbridge stopped before a building that reared itself upward like a jet of light toward the dark sky.

"Here we are," he announced.

"You don't mean you live here?" Hettie gasped.

For a large and sumptuous entrance displayed a uniformed flunky behind the grilled door. Two low-bodied and expensive cars, each chauffeured, slumbered at the curb.

"It's not as grand as it looks," said Vanbridge. "You see, on the top floor there are little rooms used by the maids and the porters, and I persuaded the superintendent to let me have one of them. It comes cheap, and gives me plenty of light for my work."

He led Hettie toward the grilled door, which the uniformed flunky held open for them.

"Good evening, Mr. Vanbridge," said the elevator boy.

They stepped from the elevator into a stone-flagged corridor, Vanbridge opened a door, and Hettie found herself beneath the sky. The lights of the city made a golden nimbus below. They walked along a tessellated path between shrubbery to another door set in what looked like a low house erected on the roof.

Vanbridge drew a key from his pocket, unlocked this second door, and held it open for Hettie to pass through. He reached to a switch, and the light revealed a vast room.

"It's a penthouse," explained Vanbridge. "I rather like living in a penthouse. One can step out of doors so easily. Please sit down."

He motioned her into the depths of an enormous tapestried chair. When she could collect her senses, Hettie saw that the room was a studio. She had never been in a studio, but she knew that this was one, for it contained two or three easels and stacks of unframed canvases.

There was an amazing array of other objects—a profusion of furniture, and the shining blackness of a grand piano, from which Hettie could

not take her eyes. There were all the signs of unbelievable luxury. The lights shed a gentle amber glow. Through an open door at the far end Hettie saw a second room, in dwindling perspective.

"You don't live here—you can't!" she cried.

"Why not?" he smiled. "I told you this was something like an Arabian Nights story."

Hettie got up from the chair. She looked about her quickly, and suddenly she took a few steps toward the door. She felt that she was tottering. Vanbridge had deceived her. He was some rich man who had been playing with her. She had thought that she had found a friend, that she wasn't going to be so lonely any more; but now she had no one.

"You're not going?" Vanbridge cried. "Let's get all this straight. I guess it was rotten of me not to tell you sooner, when I saw how miserable you were over that watch. The moment I saw you I said to myself: 'There's the face I want to paint—I've simply got to paint that face.' Then there was the watch. I tell you some good genius placed it there for us—for me. Then you said it was yours, and that helped, and I saw how awfully hungry you were. Please forgive me! I didn't pawn the watch. That pawnbroker is a friend of mine, and I left the watch with him, telling him to report it to the police. I had a pocketful of perfectly useless money when I met you. Please say you aren't angry with me!"

"I'm not angry," Hettie said weakly, "but I want to go home."

"But you said you were going to let me paint you. Don't go back on me! I'll never find another face like yours. I mean that I'll never find another girl I'll care a hoot about after you." He slipped an arm around her waist. "Hettie!" he breathed.

She drew away from him.

"You can't care for me," she told him. "It's impossible. We don't know each other. We're strangers."

"Don't you believe in love at first sight?"

"I don't know."

"Well, it's an interesting question," said Vanbridge. "I expect Ito will be back by ten o'clock. He'll give us tea, and we can speculate over the problem, across the cups."

"All right," Hettie said.

She had another vision of herself alone in her hall bedroom; and anyway, even if he was rich, she thought she liked Vanbridge—liked him a great deal.

"**B**UT," said Vanbridge, toward midnight, "we can't truthfully call it love at first sight. We've known each other more than six hours. I *thought* I loved you at first, but now I realize what a paltry sentiment it was, compared to what I feel now; and since your affection for me has grown gradually—you see? So I guess it's all right, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," said Hettie, wondering if, like the fabulous splendors of the Arabian Nights, all this would vanish, and she would find herself once more in the rain, alone.

Shivering at that thought, she crept into Vanbridge's arms.



*And then the Prince of her dreams stepped forward,
bowed low and kissed her hand!*



Twenty Minute Princess

*She found her romance in a moonlit garden where
royalty walked and dreamed of love*

By Walter Marquiss

NO one in Arian Park was more intrigued or excited than Arla Deane over the approaching marriage of Prince Paul to the Princess Marie Louise.

Arla lived just next door to the spacious estate of Mrs. Potter Van Eagles, grandmother of the royal bride-to-be, in whose house the wedding was to take place. Besides—

"I think Prince Paul is positively divine," Arla said.

With her chum, Ruby Morehouse, who dwelt across the road, she was poring over Sunday rotogravure pictures of the prince in various poses. Her brown eyes sparkled, and her pretty features were alight as she made lively comments about the regal pair.

"I saw him twice last summer—once in Vienna and again at Nice. Handsome! Oh, I could just love him to death!"

"Lots of good it would do you:

he'll be married tomorrow—what's the Princess like? The papers haven't had any pictures of her."

"I've never seen her," Arla returned. "Old Mrs. Van Eagels guards her like—well, like an eagle. Of course, she's only been in Arian Park a week."

"I wonder what's the idea of having the wedding—state wedding, as the papers call it—in America."

"I don't know, unless Mrs. Van Eagels made 'em, or something. They say she owns half the kingdom over there, and what she says is law with her son-in-law, the King. You know she's had the Princess over here four or five years, going to school."

"Do you suppose it's true they've never seen each other?"

Arla shrugged. "All I know is what the papers say. Marriage arranged by the court diplomats—all that."

"But they call it a love match."

"I know. Courtship by mail. Correspondence course in love and kisses!"

"Imagine! Can you tie that?"

"I suppose it is possible—for princesses," Arla said skeptically.

Her companion sighed, her eyes dreamy.

"Wonder what it's like to be a princess? I suppose she's just a young, human girl, like you and me." Ruby looked sharply at Arla, and added: "What are you smiling at?"

Arla replied with a gay little laugh:

"Oh, something silly. You know, Ruby, I've been playing a game with myself. Every night lately I've been sneaking through the wall—there's an old gate, supposed to be locked—and roaming around the Van Eagels garden pretending I'm the Princess!"

Ruby looked at once scornful and envious.

"Well, that's silly for a grown-up girl. But I'll bet it was fun!"

"Fun!" Arla stretched her arms above her head, and wriggled her young body, athrill with the pleasure of being alive. "I get so I almost feel like I am Princess Marie Louise, waiting for—Prince Paul!"

IT was after ten o'clock that evening when Arla again pressed open the gate in the high stone wall that separated her home from the estate of the Van Eagels.

Arla was just romantic enough to feel a sort of enchantment about the moonlit garden wherein had trod the feet of royalty. The soft light filtering through the trees produced a vague, weaving pattern on the sward, giving the place a hushed eeriness, like a fairyland, with all the unreality of an ecstatic dream.

Did Marie Louise feel all this when she walked in the garden, perhaps communing in fancy with her royal lover?

In such surroundings and such a mood, Arla was all but hypnotized by her own capricious imagination. She unclasped her wide bracelet, fastened the ends in her hair above the temples, and breathed a low gurgle of laughter over her absurd conceit that she was wearing a coronet!

Suddenly she realized that a tall young man had come through the gate, and was approaching her over the moon-marked turf.

Startled yet entranced Arla watched him. He was moving cautiously, his attention apparently centered upon the mansion in the distance. He was almost abreast before he saw her and stopped abruptly. A thrill went slipping down Arla's back when she recognized features made familiar by many recent pictures in the newspapers.

"Prince Paul!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

He came up to her slowly, his eyes upon her face, or perhaps upon the gleaming bracelet across the front of her hair. Arla thought that he was even more handsome than the pictures she had seen of Prince Paul. For a moment he gazed at her as if enthralled. Then he sank to one knee, lifted her hand to his lips.

"Your Highness!" he said softly. "At last I have seen you!"

He raised his face to reveal a smile that seemed to rob her of all feeling save that it was wonderful to have him near. For long she had thought much about Prince Paul, and dreamed of him. Was it yet another dream that she was now alone with him—in the moonlight?

Dimly, Arla realized that she must tell him that he had mistaken a rather ordinary American girl for the Princess. But first, why not talk with him, listen to the music of his voice? The moment was too glorious to toss lightly aside.

"You speak in English," she murmured.

"After you, *mademoiselle*. So you first addressed me. *Aimez vous le Française mieux?*"

"*Monsieur; pas du tout!* I really do prefer English." It occurred to her that she could go but a little way with her halting French. The deficiencies he would quickly detect.

"I think the English is very beautiful," he declared soberly. "And America is a very beautiful country."

SMILING, he drew her hand through his arm, and they fell into step, strolling slowly over the soft lawn, keeping well away from the house. Arla, shivering with keen pleasure at the proximity of the man, was beset by a kind of exquisite terror.

To be mistaken for a princess—and by a prince!

Her pulse was thumping with a noisy rhythm which she felt he certainly must hear. This couldn't go on; she must tell him the truth. Suppose he should—kiss her! She must tell him. But why was it so difficult? And what would he think? With her thoughts in a jumble, she kept slow pace with him.

A little tremulously, she inquired: "Tell me, why did you come here?"

He paused, turning to face her, smiling down into her eyes.

"Why not, your Highness? Until now, remember, the Prince has never seen his Princess."

"Oh!" Arla said.

"Marriages of state may be arranged for sons of kings, Marie Louise. But a man prefers to see his bride!"

She seemed about to speak, but remained silent. He went on softly:

"The Prince is happy to accept the marriage of state: it is his lot. But the man hungers to hear from the lips of the loved one, her thoughts and joys and sorrows—and what she thinks of him! *N'est-ce pas?*"

To Arla it was as if something suffocating were closing slowly around her. Her thoughts—she could not control them. How was she to disillusion him? The longer she hesitated the more difficult it became; she mustn't defer. If she could only get away from him long enough to assemble her reason—it was his nearness that enchanted her. His nearness, and the moonlight.

"You are very beautiful," he said in a low tone, looking intently at her. She sank down upon a rustic bench, trembling, speechless. He sat beside her, and held her hand.

—"Are you—very happy?"

Her body was rigid; so tense it seemed something must break. She kept thinking that she must answer, somehow; but what to say?

He broke in on her silence, huskily:

"Do you not love—your Prince?"

Gasping, she found voice.

"You mustn't—you mustn't talk like—"

THERE was a burning quality in his eyes which effectively checked her speech. She caught her breath sharply, while he breathed rapidly and heavily as if he fought some unexpected inner power. Involuntarily, with lips parted, she swayed a little toward him.

"Ah! You are beautiful!" he cried again. The next moment Arla was fast in his arms.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You mustn't!"

For an instant she resisted, but her senses were reeling. Overwhelmed by emotion, she felt herself swallowed up in his embrace.

"You wonderful, wonderful girl!"

Arla scarcely knew what was happening. Yet she was aware of a terrifying ecstasy. Her arms crept up and around his neck. She clung to him as he covered her lips with his, trembling in his arms.

"You wonderful sweetheart! You love me!"

"Yes. Oh, yes!" The admission forced itself out.

He kissed her temples, her cheeks and, again, her mouth, shivering, holding her as if he feared that she would somehow be torn away.

And then, after a few throbbing moments, his arms relaxed. As though some cold, invisible barrier had dropped between them, they moved apart. The man turned, lowered his face in his

palms. Presently, collecting her scattered senses with an effort, Arla spoke slowly, in a dull voice:

"Your—Your Highness! There's something I must—must tell you."

He jerked to his feet. Hurt throbbed in his tone.

"Tell me nothing!" he cried. "I will not listen!"

He dropped to one knee and bowed his head. She could feel him trembling as he lifted her hand to his lips.

"Your Highness! I hope you can forgive this—this imposition!"

Seemingly motivated by a single impulse, they arose, facing each other. She was about to speak, but he raised his hand. It was like a command, and she was silent. For a long minute he stared at her, fists gripped tensely at his sides.

"Good-by!" he said in a hoarse voice. "Good-by, Your Highness!"

After a long look, he turned away. Arla heard him breathe deeply; then he trudged off through the trees.

She stood looking after him until he was out of sight, dry-eyed, but aching; then sagged down upon the bench again, staring into space.

It was like a lost dream, so nebulous and impossible, yet so poignantly real. Absently she felt of the bracelet which she had fastened above her forehead. Loosening it slowly, she held it in her hand, peering down at it. Was it that which had caused Prince Paul to mistake her for the Princess? Arla gave a pained little laugh, jerky and uncertain; tears sprang up in her eyes, and flooded over.

AFTER awhile she got to her feet with a listless movement. Raising her eyes she started and cried out in alarm. A tall man, with a trim, white beard and long, gray hair, stood

a few feet off, regarding her gravely.
 "Young woman, what are you doing here?"

The deep voice, with its queer foreign accent, was stern; yet Arla sensed an underlying note of kindness. He

moiselle, there are many things you Americans do not understand. There are intrigues—we have heard rumors of a—what you call it—a plot."

"A' plot!" Arla's breath thickened with dread. "Against—Prince Paul?"



Flushly he questioned: "Do you not love your Prince?"

stepped closer; she saw his brows draw together in the dim light.

"Ah, you are the young lady who lives next door," he remarked at length. "Miss—Miss Deane, is it not?"

She nodded, and he smiled slightly. His tone, however, continued grave.

"You must not come in here, my child. It is not safe for you."

The tone stirred her.

"Not safe? Why?"

"Why?" he echoed. "Ah, *made-*

"Quite so. I doubt not that the rumors are exaggerated, but we take no chances. Both the Prince and Her

Highness are well guarded. I wonder that you could have entered these grounds without being seen."

"I'm sorry," Arla murmured. "I'll not—come again!" A sob swelled in her throat. With a weary gesture she put her hand over her eyes.

"Come," the tall man commanded, "I will take you home."

She walked with him to the gate, and

through it. He bowed and said, "Good night, *mademoiselle*," but she caught his arm.

"Tell me, do I look like—Princess Marie Louise?"

He studied her face, again smiling as he shook his head.

"Except that you are both young, and both very lovely, Miss Deane, there is no resemblance."

Arla choked a little when she bade the man "Good night." With another bow, he went through the gate, closing it, while Arla peered dreamily after him.

She did not resemble the Princess!

Then it was she herself whom Paul loved, not that woman born to purple robes and ermine! It was not Marie Louise who possessed the heart of the Prince!

Thus Arla thought, carried away by her heart, emotion ascendant over intelligence. Yet reason soon quelled the sudden excitement of hope. Arla realized the futility of it all. Though she loved him, knew that he loved her, nothing could come of it. If she ever saw Prince Paul again, it would be from a distance.

WITH an agonizing feeling of loss, she walked slowly to the house and climbed the stairs to her room. There she sat upon the edge of the bed, thinking, yet trying not to think. She heard the ring of the doorbell, as a far-away, unreal sound. A moment later hurried footsteps padded on the stairs. The door flew open and Ruby Morehouse popped in.

"Arla! I was watching with my glasses from the window. And just after you sneaked in the garden, a man came and went in. I couldn't see him very well, but he looked like—Arla, was it—Prince Paul?"

Arla looked up at her friend for only an instant. Her lips trembled, and she bent her head, covered her face with her hands. Surprised, Ruby sat down beside her and put an arm about Arla's shoulders.

"Why, Arla, dear! What happened?"

"He—he thought I was the Princess!"

Ruby gasped. "Arla! How romantic!"

"Oh, Ruby! I've been a silly fool ever to go over there. And now—"

She dropped her head against Ruby's breast and sobbed. Ruby, puzzled, tried to comfort her.

As she grew quieter Arla told her friend of the episode in the garden, while Ruby listened in excited amazement, making little ejaculations from time to time.

"He said he—he loved me, Ruby! And he—he kissed me!" Sobs again interrupted Arla's recital, but after a moment she went on: "I tried to tell him I wasn't the Princess, but he wouldn't listen. He made me say I—I loved him! And then he said he hoped I would forgive him for 'this imposition!' Ruby, what did he mean by that?"

Ruby pursed her lips.

"I don't know, dear. Maybe he wasn't supposed to see the Princess until to-morrow. I don't know much about state weddings."

Arla caught her breath.

"Oh, Ruby, maybe he meant—maybe he knew I wasn't Marie Louise!" She started up feverishly, and Ruby's arm tightened. At once the fire died down. "But he didn't know. Because when he left he, said, 'Good-by, Your Highness!'"

For a space she was silent, shoulders and head slumped down. Then, with

a deep, jerky breath, she cried, "Oh, Ruby! I love him so!"

THOUGH filled with sympathy for her friend's apparent suffering, Ruby reflected that Arla was doing her thinking with her heart. For such a condition, often the only palliative was a dose of common sense.

"Listen, Arla," she said somewhat brusquely, "you're talking nonsense. People don't fall in love all of a sudden like that. You've let the moon go to your head. You've let yourself fall in love with love!"

Arla shook her head, and spoke wearily:

"No, Ruby, you don't understand. This afternoon—you remember I laughed at the idea of falling in love with—with Paul. I didn't tell you that's just what I've been doing ever since last Summer!"

"Arla, no! You only think so."

"I know it, I tell you! I've been collecting his pictures, sitting here mooning over them. I know I'm a romantic little goose, but—I *do* love him! So very, very much!"

Ruby bit at her lower lip, trying to formulate some argument to compel Arla to think more rationally. Yet the girl's distress was so obviously real that it clouded even Ruby's mind and mood.

"I'll never have a chance to talk to him again," Arla went on. "Oh, Ruby, life is cruel!"

"Brace up, dear. You'll get over it in time."

"I'll *never* get over it!"

"Oh, yes, you will. You'll just have to forget it."

Arla smiled sadly and shook her head. She spoke as if thinking aloud.

"I can see him to-morrow, a little while. When he leaves the hotel to come to the—to the wedding."

"But, Arla, won't that be just torturing yourself?"

"Oh, but I must. I'm going to drive to town to-morrow and—and see him."

"Want me to go with you?"

"If you want to, Ruby."

"All rightie. I'll be over first thing in the morning." And she added peremptorily: "Now you go to bed and get some sleep. That's what you need."

She kissed Arla affectionately, and went home.

But Arla slept not at all—

EARLY in the morning the two girls were on their way in Arla's blue roadster toward the New York hotel in which Prince Paul had awaited the dawn of his wedding day. The Prince, so the newspapers had said, expected to motor out to Arian Park, starting about ten. The marriage was to be solemnized at high noon.

As she drove, Arla was much more calm, but there were lines of weariness and pain about her mouth and eyes. She drove rapidly; it was well before ten when she stopped the car a few feet from the canopy which reached from the door of the hotel to the curb.

A small crowd of the curious stood about, waiting, and a few policemen walked here and there with little to do. Before the hotel was parked a huge black limousine, attended by chauffeur and footmen resplendent in uniforms.

Soon after Arla and Ruby arrived, a big sedan drew up just behind them. In her mirror, Arla had a glimpse of two men, dark-featured, with foreign-looking mustaches. She paid them little heed, but kept her gaze fastened on the hotel.

"It's nearly ten," she said with a sigh after a long, silent wait. Even as she spoke, there was a stir at the hotel entrance. The curious on the

sidewalk jammed forward, forming a lane from door to curb, pushing for vantage against the line of police which had formed with the sudden efficiency of an organization long accustomed to cope with eager crowds.

"He's coming!" Arla cried. She sprang to her feet, holding on to the steering-wheel, eyes bright, pulse leaping. "There he is!"

Hemmed in by uniformed men, a small but brilliant pageant, Prince Paul stepped smartly from the door, and strode across the walk. A cheer arose, typical of personality-worshipping America, and the Prince paused beside the limousine to bow gravely, right and left. Then he vanished inside the car, and the uniforms scurried to their places.

Arla sank heavily down upon the seat. "Oh, he's wonderful!" she whispered, with a sob in her throat. Ruby, understanding, squeezed her hand.

There was a sudden clatter of motorcycle engines, and a screaming of sirens. Led and trailed by motor police, the limousine got under way and sped up the broad avenue. Starting her own car, Arla fell in behind and kept pace.

Only a few blocks had been covered when Arla saw in her mirror the big sedan with the mustached men suddenly spurt forward. For a moment it hung alongside Arla's car. Glancing at it, she saw that its curtains were partially drawn. In another instant, she glimpsed a bearded face in the gap between the bottom of the curtain and the edge of the window. She uttered a sharp, terrified cry.

"Oh! He's got a gun!"

Ruby turned, exclaiming: "What? Why?"

The sedan leaped ahead. Arla saw an inch or so of round muzzle poking out from the curtained window.

"They're going to kill him!" she screamed.

There were loud shouts from the motor policemen following the prince's conveyance. Several shots were fired at the darting sedan, which now had drawn almost abreast of the limousine.

Arla jammed her foot down on the accelerator. The powerful motor jerked the roadster violently ahead. Arla steered between two motorcycles, from which policemen were firing with uncertain aim. She saw the weapon protrude a little further from the sedan window, and waver a bit, as if the man who held it were taking aim.

With another scream, she twisted the steering-wheel sharply to the left. Her car swerved, skidded, and with a crash struck the big sedan just beside the right rear wheel. Six or eight barking explosions, close together, rang in her ears. And at once all was black—

AS Arla regained consciousness, she was being lifted into an ambulance. She had a hazy impression of many faces on all sides, and of uniformed policemen handling her with tender gentleness. Above, a bearded young doctor in a white smock smiled down at her as he saw that her eyes were open.

"You'll be all right now."

Arla could only look at him.

"The other girl wasn't quite as lucky as you!" another voice remarked.

"Ruby! Hurt?"

The surgeon glanced at Arla.

"Broken wrist, and cut by glass, is all," he said. "She'll be all right."

Arla's aching brain tried to reconstruct the events of the morning. Suddenly she sat upright.

"Prince Paul! Was he—"

A policeman, with a gold star on his chest, answered the question.

"Perfectly safe, thanks to you, miss. They tried to get him with a machine gun. Anarchists, I guess. They'd have succeeded if you hadn't plowed into them. Shots all went wild, and we got every man of them. The Prince must be almost out to his wedding by now."

There was more than a note of admiration in the officer's voice as he added, "Quick thinking, sister!"

Arla sank slowly back, covering her face with her hands.

"Oh, thank God!" she whispered.

"We're going to take you down to the hospital and have a look at you," the doctor declared. "If you're as all right as you seem you can go on home."

"You won't be able to go home in your car, though," the policeman observed with a friendly grin. "Gosh, what a wreck!"

IN bed in her own room that evening, Arla read the accounts in the newspapers of the wedding of Prince Paul and the Princess Marie Louise. There also were sensational stories of the unsuccessful attack upon the Prince.

Now and then a tear slipped down Arla's cheek, but again she smiled, somewhat wistfully, but with sincere feeling. If the man she loved was lost to her, at least she had been able to do him a service!

Mrs. Deane, who had reported to her daughter that a message from the hospital concerning Ruby had been entirely optimistic, had gone downstairs in answer to a ring at the doorbell. Now Arla heard her returning, other, firmer footsteps accompanying hers.

"This way, gentlemen," said Mrs. Deane, just outside the room.

A man in a gorgeous uniform stepped in, stood aside, and announced

in a voice which would have carried over an enormous hall:

"His Royal Highness Prince Paul!"

Immediately the Prince strode through the door, halted abruptly, and bowed to a complete right angle.

As he appeared a quick breath hissed through Arla's lips, and tears so filled her eyes that his face appeared blurred. She bit her lip to keep from crying out.

The announcer strode to the side of the bed.

"His highness," he declared, "regrets that he does not speak English."

Incredulous, Arla struggled to her elbow. *Not speak English!*

She dashed the tears from her eyes and stared. In the splendor of his uniform the Prince looked taller. On his left cheek was a small scar—it hadn't been there last night! She sat upright, staring, astounded.

This was not Prince Paul! It was not the man who was in the garden with her last night!

"His highness," continued the loud voice, in a singsong, "desires to thank you most kindly, Miss Deane, for the service you have rendered to him and to his country, and to present this check, which he hopes will repay you for the damage to your motor car."

Arla scarcely heard; her brain was paralyzed with bewilderment. She accepted the check with a gesture half mechanical, and continued to stare at Prince Paul.

The aid, saluting, stepped back. Prince Paul strode forward and once more bowed before Arla.

"*Mademoiselle! Nous vous remercions!*"

He bent low and kissed her hand.

She scarcely knew this action was taking place. Where—who was the man who had kissed her lips?

Prince Paul straightened up, turned

squarely about, and marched from the room, his satellite trailing.

ARLA sank back on her pillow, chills coursing along her back, her mind in a turmoil of bewilderment and of doubt that these things could actually have happened. Her lover was not Prince Paul! Then who was he?

Mrs. Deane returned, smiling with pride and affection, and patted her daughter's hand.

"There's a reporter downstairs, dear, who wants to ask you about this morning. Do you feel like seeing him?"

Arla smiled wanly, caressed her mother's hand, and nodded. Mrs. Deane went out, and soon Arla again heard a tread on the stairs. A tall young man came briskly into the room. Just inside he stopped as if he had run against a wall.

"Great Scott!" he cried. "You?"

Arla sat bolt upright, eyes wide and amazed. Was she dreaming again? She knew that voice! The man had the same features—no, not quite the same, but almost—as Prince Paul. What was more important, he was the man who had been with her in the garden! He ran forward and grasped Arla's hand.

"Are you—you're not Prince Paul?"

He lowered his head, as if ashamed. His voice was husky.

"I'm not a prince, and my name isn't Paul. I'm only a newspaper man, Bart Ellis. And a cad!"

She frowned. "But I—I don't understand."

He explained: "It was because I look like Prince Paul, a little. The city editor sent me out to prow around and see if I could see the Princess. She'd never been interviewed, you know. So I was to pretend I was the Prince and get you—get her to talk. It's generally believed they'd never met each other, you see."

"Oh, I see," Arla lay back on her pillow, feeling weak.

"I feel beastly about it," he continued.

She did not answer, but rested in the pleasure of hearing his voice again.

"The stunt worked all right, but—After what happened, I couldn't write the story I got."

"Lucky you didn't," Arla said with a twinkle, "seeing I'm not a princess, after all!"

"Then you're not—you don't despise me?"

Again she smiled. "I was—was in my right mind—last night!" She shivered a little, wondering if he would catch her meaning.

He did!

"So was I!" His eyes lighted up. She looked at him, and there was invitation in her glance. In a moment he held her in his arms, and was kissing her.

"But I can't give you a palace in Europe," he remarked. "Best I can do is a flat in the Bronx!"

She gave a little gurgle of laughter, and nestled against him.

"I—I shall love—a flat in the Bronx," she murmured.

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Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER



JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, cure "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or both services, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

Girls' clubs or organizations in New York or vicinity may secure Mr. Fraser's services for an evening's lecture by addressing him care this magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.

I SUPPOSE, girls, that as long as the old world wags, there will be "Micawbers"—male and female—in our midst; the kind of folk, you know, who always keep on waiting for "something to turn up." Judging by my mail from day to day, the number of those unpractical optimists is legion.

It's bad enough to get tired thinking

about the hum-drum worries of life, but to get into a comatose state when one's in love, is unthinkable to me. Such is the case, however, with thousands of girls to-day. They have so many boy friends at their beck and call that their minds get muddled, and thinking becomes a burden to them. And men are just as bad—every bit.

To all such, I want to say, don't call upon me to do your thinking! - I've enough to do. In other words, *don't* send me samples of *several* different handwritings for me to choose the lucky winner. Do your own choosing, and I'll tell you if you are suited, or unsuited, to each other. Two samples of handwriting is the limit. Your own, and one other sample.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

to say that I enjoy reading its stories whenever
Marilyn
much talked of, character
Andrew

(Miss Marilyn S., New York City.) Your sweetheart is a man who must be forever on the move, and who is full of business all the time. He is rather outspoken and inclined to be ostentatious in his manner. This boy has a distinctive personality, due to the fact that he wants to be odd, and different from other people in dress and conversation. Doubtless many of his friends call Andrew eccentric. I would myself. He belongs to the type of men who are never happy unless they are monopolizing the conversation at the table. And when all is said and done, their talk is merely a form of deep breathing. I notice your boy friend has a nasty habit of putting off. I'm sure you've been annoyed many times by the way he keeps, or rather doesn't keep, his promises. When it comes to real sincerity and genuine honesty of purpose your Andrew is a lightweight. He is a disappointment-and-no-fooling. Your nature, on the other hand, is of the quiet, unassuming, home-loving type. You've been brought up by rather strict rules. You are just the antithesis of Andrew in the matter of talking. You have apparently benefitted by your mother's advice, that "little girls should be seen and not heard," and as a result you don't say much at any time. My honest opinion is, you are far too good for Andrew, and I question very much if your nerves could stand the strain of having such a fellow around the house, day in and day out. Now remember, there's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught. And this applies to men as well as fish!



any right to go through life with
Susan
I am indeed interested in
Gilbert

(Susan E., Birmingham, Ala.) I see great possibilities for happiness and genuine companionship for you with Gilbert as your husband. This boy has all the earmarks of a "coming man." He is a clean-cut fellow who is earnest-

ly striving to do his bit for the world and humanity. To look at handwriting such as you submitted for my examination, simply thrills me with joy and satisfaction. It revives my belief in human nature, and dissolves a growing cynicism for mankind in general, which steals into my inner consciousness from time to time. Between the two of you I find a fine combination of talents. Your cultured taste and analytical mind place you among those whose opinions are sought for publication. Of course, I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that you are a little bit too ceremonious at times. Your observance of etiquette in social matters is perhaps overdone and somewhat silly. Your opinions about other peo-

ple could also stand less emphasizing. Your habit of denouncing things which do not appeal to your æsthetic tastes, is damaging to your otherwise splendid characteristics. Your boy friend, on the other hand, is finely equipoised, both in mind and in body. He is very romantic, and of a literary turn of mind. He ought to be quite capable of filling your life with sunshine and happiness, since his tastes and hobbies fit in with yours so admirably. If there is anything in Gilbert's nature in the form of a weakness, I would say it was pessimism.

I notice a tendency here and there toward real "blues." However, your own sunny nature should be sufficient to change this.



revealed in my handwriting
Bessie
as to whether or not I should
Sam

(Miss Bessie G., Flint, Mich.) Although I enjoyed your letter and read with interest of Sam's virtues and foibles, it was quite unnecessary for you to write at such length. I can see right away that the boy is playing a square game with you. Your fears and doubts were largely brought about by that jealous and suspicious nature of yours. When you looked at your own good qualities, you used a magnifying glass, but when you came to Sam's virtues you peeped at them through the wrong end of a telescope. Your case is not a bit different from thousands of others. Like many another girl, you thought your sweetheart was so perfect that Saint Peter had already measured him for a harp, and that you were to be the happy one who was to benefit

by this perfection while your embryonic harpist was still on earth. Then your misunderstanding arose, and the scene was changed. Your daydreams became nightmares, and you realized for the first time that your idol had clay feet. To all of which I say, "Amen!" If you want me to be candid with you, Bessie, I feel more sorry for Sam than I do for you. You deserve a good spanking, and to be told exactly where to go. Your little jealous mind has done you untold harm when it comes to inner peace and happiness. You're simply stiff-necked and stubborn, and your ideas about Sam's alleged double-dealing are unjustifiable. The fact of the matter is, Bessie, you are now so slow to see any good in Sam, you have actually got the red

flannel habit, which is giving you rheumatism in the mind. A mental extirpator is as necessary to you as your toothbrush. You have far too

many germs in that mind of yours concerning Sam, for you ever to be happy with this boy. Suspicion and mistrust make a poor basis for marriage, Bessie.

—❖—

*You can see by the letter head an
analysis of my handwriting,*
Vera
Robert

(Miss Vera T., Stamford, Conn.) You two young folk have many things in common, and consequently ought to be very happy in each other's company. Your question as to whether a girl ought to continue working after the wedding, is not meant for this department. Since you ask me, however, I don't mind telling you my purely private conviction that a wife's place is in the home! Perhaps I'm old-fashioned in my ideas on this matter, but I never have had much use for the fellow who marries a girl and expects her to be a joint breadwinner to the family. If his income is too slender to support the household, I would say he should not be married. But of course if it is an agreement mutually satisfactory— To come back to your own case, Vera, I observe that you are a business woman to the finger tips, and that executive ability just shoots out from your penmanship. This might be sufficient justification for you to continue in business if your sweetheart Robert had been anything else than what he is. As it is, Robert is a man who possesses many splendid traits. He has force of character, and determination of purpose along with an abundance of good sense. Why he should think it necessary for you to go back to your typewriter in the office puzzles me.

After all, these "delicatessen marriages" are purely a matter of taste, and something that no outsider can settle. It's entirely up to the couple themselves. As to your suitability, and your happiness when married, I wouldn't have the slightest hesitation in giving you my blessing, and suggest that you hurry up and send me a piece of the wedding cake.

—❖—

YOUR CAREER

You will write an

(Mrs. Susan D. I., Knoxville, Tenn.) Under the circumstances, Susan, you would be all the better to get into some position where you would not only be making a living for yourself, but at the same time helping to forget the past. Your letter gave me food for thought. It was not one of the happiest I've read to-day, by any means, and since that is the case I feel it my duty to help you to the best of my ability. An analysis of your penmanship leads me to say that you would do well as a social worker. I'm sure you would be a great success in a very short time in this line of work, which would suit you much better than private tutoring. Your calm, quiet manner, coupled with your tactfulness and

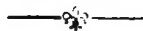
natural buoyancy of spirit make it easy for you to go in and win. After all, the greatest joy we get out of living is when we are helping those less fortunate than ourselves. By touching other lives we unconsciously become stronger in character, and more useful to society. And this is what you require more than anything else. In the meantime you are far too introspective, and it is only by a little self-sacrifice that you can get back again the real pleasures of life. Write at once to one or other of the social service organizations in your city, and offer your services as a helper. I'm sure the work will interest you.



Will you please

(Irene T., Louisville, Kentucky.) In my opinion you are far too romantic and unsettled to get much joy out of "standing behind a counter the whole day," as you state in your letter. A successful saleslady must have an infinite amount of patience and tact. And that's just what you lack to a large extent. Your slow progress is, perhaps, due to the fact that your mind is seldom on your work, and your boss knows it. A morning, or a day off, every other week, is not going to yield you a very fat bonus at Christmas. Neither is it an incentive to your employer to appoint you to the floor. A girl of nineteen, as you say you are, should be striving to better herself in the position she occupies. The trouble with you, Irene, is, you have no vision. Your boy friend has simply come between you and common sense. Your love for Bob may be all very sincere, but I see no necessity for you to lose your head and eventually lose your

job, for the sake of a little calf love. Sit down and have a little talk with yourself about the matter.



need very much willing

(Miss Catherine K., Boise, Idaho.) Your penmanship reveals to me that your forte is in the artistic field. The contour of your small letters and your delicate touch leads me to the conclusion that you would be admirably suited for the work of china-painting, or of pottery-making. This profession is by no means overcrowded, since it demands skill with the fingers as well as a creative brain. Seldom have I seen handwriting which points to all the six essential traits necessary to success in this art as yours does. In the first place, you have the concentrative mind, then comes that inexorable patience of yours, followed by your distinct taste for color. The others are part and parcel of yourself which would all help to lead you on to fame and fortune. Of course with your artistic tastes there is no gainsaying the fact that your talents qualify you for other positions, such as engraving, and architecture. To keep on with the everyday and prosaic lot of a filing clerk, as you are doing, is not only a sheer waste of time, but a wanton misspending of your God-given endowments.



let me know

(Miss Winnie E. O., Hutchinson, Kansas.) You are first and last a business woman, Winnie. Your talents would be invaluable in the commercial field. Buying and selling should be the easiest things in the world to you. I like your breeziness of manner, and

your go-ahead personality. If you were "on the road," I'm sure your customers would look forward to your visits, and your popularity would bring you increased sales. You are eventually destined for a position in the markets of the world, where brains and business acumen are most essential. Though physique has, on the whole, little to do with the measure of one's success, in your case it is different. Your height, which you say is five feet ten inches, is a natural advantage and should not be overlooked. A commanding presence demands respect every time, and a magnetic personality such as yours ought to secure the undivided attention of the hardest-boiled executive. You should not waste any time in getting connected with some reputable organization located in one of the larger cities in your state, and give everything you've got to the buying end of the business. I wouldn't be surprised to hear if, some day in the near future, you were on your way to London and Paris to do the firm's buying in the foreign markets. I wish you the best of luck.

interesting and

(Miss Maud C. Y., Tacoma, Washington.) It is impossible for me to answer all your questions, Maud, in the short space I have at my disposal in the magazine, but I shall make it my business to write you privately, and help to guide you out of your dilemma. Regarding the line of work you should follow, I see at once that you would make a real good dietician. You seem to be a practical-minded girl, with a faculty for accuracy and detail. You have lots of self-restraint. You would

never get off the handle very much. You believe in thinking twice before speaking once. Some people would call you reserved and somewhat unapproachable. I would myself. Moreover, I observe that you are very romantic and unconventional. You have a great fondness for new things, and for new experiences. And I'm afraid it is from just that trait that all your trouble has come. You are apt to carry your chin a little too high, with the result that people have labeled you "stuck-up." If that be the case, the sooner you come down to earth the better it will be for yourself and for your chances to succeed. Your scientific mind ought to prove invaluable to you in the branch of hygiene which pertains to diet and dieting.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

he make up to

(Herbert L., Baton Rouge, La.) Your penmanship points to the fact that you have not much self-reliance. You have a somewhat fawning disposition, and are inclined to cringe too much to your superiors. The thing you need most is backbone. Assert yourself more. Remember you have a personality to be projected, and an individuality to be protected. From what I can see, you have a good supply of brains, but you are not using them to the best advantage. Moreover, you are very impatient. You get "off the handle" too quickly. You would do well to cultivate self-control. "Grim and bear" may be good old-fashioned advice, but sing and bear is a great deal better. I notice you are rather magnanimous and open-hearted when it comes to the spending of money. You

are no tightwad. Your imaginative power is not much to brag about. I would say you are more practical than imaginative. From another angle I see you let people "walk all over you." You don't seem to have the faculty to stick up for your rights. You are far too passive when it comes to personal interests. In future, don't be so silent. Blow your horn a little louder, and you'll be respected all the more for it. The more faith a man has in himself the quicker he will succeed. Faith is the pencil of the soul that limns heavenly things.



run so true

(Mrs. N. C. R., Tucson, Ariz.) You are a humble-minded sort of woman, and care little about getting into the

spotlight. You believe in "doing your bit" in your own quiet way, and in your own family, and are content to let the rest of the world go by. Your power of imagination is rather poor: in fact, both mentally and physically you are apathetic. You have will-power and resistance in abundance, but the trouble is, you have no real ambition to exert yourself. I would say you are somewhat clannish, and have pronounced preference for your own people, and intimate friends. I like your versatility, and your frank, open nature. Your generous-heartedness is refreshing, and beneath that crust of pessimism, which, by the way, is very apparent in your make-up, there lies a redeeming sense of humor. I observe you don't object to hearing a little gossip now and then. I wouldn't be surprised if that was your hobby.

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